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# **Right-Wing Sisterhood: Everyday Politics of Hindu Nationalist Women in India and Zionist Settler Women in Israel- Palestine**

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multi-religious syncretic times/practices and of secular sentiments in the subcontinent (Sarkar & Butalia, 1998; Hansen, 1999; Bhatt, 2001). At the heart of these erasures of the 'other' are practices of denial that formulate certain subjectivities.

Cohen (2001), in his book *States of Denial*, identifies three forms of denial that allow individuals and collectives (and states) to know *and then* ignore atrocities and human suffering. The first, *literal denial* refuses to acknowledge the 'facts' and asserts that the claims of atrocity and brutality are simply untrue. The second, *interpretive denial* acknowledges the facts but gives them a different meaning and narrative. The third, *implicatory denial* does not side line the 'facts' and their interpretation, however, through a series of rationalizations, denies the political and ethical implications of the events in these narratives. Unlike literal and interpretive denial, knowing about suffering and atrocity are not in question here, but the manner and level of action and the response to this knowing hold the denial (Cohen, 2001:7-8). All three forms allow a denial of responsibility, a denial of injury, and a denial of the victim (ibid.:60-61).

In the case of the right-wing movements that are discussed in this thesis, these three forms of denial work together in enabling the aforementioned erasures of the 'other'. Excuses (including apologies, defensive accounts, and rationalizations) or what Goffman (1961) refers to as *sad tales* allow settler women and Hindu right-wing women to deny all three—the victim, the injury, and any responsibility. For my interlocutors, the victim, as a collective, does not exist, and the victim, as an individual, is either to blame for all that befalls him (a denial of responsibility) or is simply exaggerating his/her plight (denial of injury).

## Declaration

I have read and understood regulation 17.9 of the Regulations for students of the SOAS, University of London concerning plagiarism. I undertake that all the material presented for examination is my own work and has not been written for me, in whole or in part, by any other person. I also undertake that any quotation or paraphrase from the published or unpublished work of another person has been duly acknowledged in the work which I present for examination.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Added to these ‘excuses’, are ideological allegiances that intensify this denial. For example, settler women often use their allegiance to God, to Judaism, and to the mythological idea of the Jewish land/Jewish state to bring coherence to their narratives of denial. As Yehudit pointed to me in a long interview,

We are just here because that is what *H'Shem* wanted us to do; if people were going to be hurt in the process (especially innocent people) he would not have wanted us to live in this Jewish land. God is kind, why would he allow us to harm anyone?<sup>339</sup>

For the Hindu right-wing woman, an allegiance to Hindu nationalism as well as to a neoliberal idea of ‘India Shining’ enables a similar twisted process. As Pooja elaborated in an interview in Delhi,

The media claims that we are anti-Muslim and we are violent against their community. We are not violent against anyone. We just want what is best for India and India’s development. If someone is being *anti-national* and not allowing us to move forward as a country, then of course we have to take action. I am a *proud Hindu* want to see India rise and beat China and even America and I will do anything to make that happen. But how is that violence? How can there be a victim if it is about making our country go forward?<sup>340</sup>

Adding to Cohen’s (2001) pertinent analyses, I put forth three arguments related to practices of charity and denial here.

First, as elaborated in the previous sections, charitable efforts allow right-wing women to produce and constitute themselves as *positive* and ‘good’ subjects in the Foucauldian sense. Simultaneously, they also allow for an entire means of formulating the *negative* ‘other’ and denying any notion of

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<sup>339</sup> Interview with Yehudit Katsover, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 31 August 2014.

<sup>340</sup> Interview with Pooja, New Delhi, India, 18 February 2014.

## Thesis Abstract

Right-Wing movements have gained political momentum in the last few decades, drawing within their ranks women who not only embody their exclusionary and violent politics but who also simultaneously contest everyday patriarchies. This thesis examines the everyday politics of women in two right-wing movements, the cultural nationalist Hindu right-wing project in India and the settler-colonial Zionist project in Israel-Palestine. Based on fourteen months of ethnographic, narrative, and visual 'fieldwork' conducted with women in both these movements, I argue that through a politics of the everyday, right-wing women bargain and negotiate with patriarchal communities/homes, male-formulated ideologies and discourses, and male-dominated right-wing projects and spaces. These mediations replicate and affirm *as well as* subvert and challenge patriarchal structures and power hierarchies, troubling the binaries of home/world, private/public, personal/political, and victim/agent. I assert that dominant literature on right-wing women focuses on motherhood and family, ignoring various other crucial subject positions that are constituted and occupied by right-wing women and neglecting the agential and empowering potential of right-wing women's subjectivities.

I use four themes/lenses to examine the everyday politics of right-wing women. These are: pedagogy and education; charity and humanitarian work; intimacy, friendship, sociability and leisure; and political violence. By interrogating the practices that are contained in and enabled by these four *locations* of Hindu right-wing and Zionist settler women's everyday politics, this thesis highlights the multiple narratives, contradictions, pluralities, hierarchies, power structures, languages, and discourses that encompass

injury or victimhood to this other. Through service and charitable practices, the grievances of the 'other' are placed out of focus and denied existence, a voice, and an ear. By centring on right-wing communities and the lacks as well as injuries *within and to* these communities and their members (such as the lack of facilities, funding, spaces or the presence of loss and injury due to war, violence, and migration), the 'other' is simply reduced to a perpetrator, a nuisance, and a cause of lack and pain. The framing of charitable activities in ways that assert the resilience, survival, and resistance of the right-wing entity in the face of the 'other' allows my interlocutors to then justify exclusionary and violent politics as a *necessity*. For example, my interlocutors in both right-wing projects would justify policies and violence against Palestinians and Indian minority (and *anti-national*) groups as necessary, making statements such as – *They deserved it. "What could we do? We had to protect ourselves from them". "You have seen what they do to us and how we keep our communities together. Do you blame us for our politics?"*<sup>341</sup> Quotidian charitable practices allow for the proliferation of this image of the 'other' as one who only deserves contempt and violence. In the process, they also perpetuate a deep denial of any form of injury or victimhood to the other. As Nadia asserted,

If we who live in *Judea and Samaria* are working so hard to ensure everyone feels safe and everyone is looked after and doing so much work even in the face of adversity, then can you imagine, if we ever do have to take action against an Arab, then it is not violence, it is a *necessity*. If they let us reach that level, it is their fault not ours.<sup>342</sup>

Second, as mentioned earlier, charitable practices equip right-wing women with the ways to elevate themselves to superior levels of morality and

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<sup>341</sup> Fieldnotes, London, UK, 20 October 2014.

<sup>342</sup> Interview with Nadia, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 8 August 2014.

right-wing women's projects. By capturing the processes of subject formation of right-wing women, I encapsulate how my interlocutors shape the subjectivities of those in their communities, transforming the local and international landscapes of the Hindu right-wing and the Zionist settler project. Drawing together ethnographic narratives, 'story-telling', visuals, methodological and ethical reflections, and inter-disciplinary theoretical engagement, this thesis also asks what the many-layered textures of everyday politics of right-wing women might mean for feminist scholarship in gender studies, politics, and international relations, for feminist methodologies, for feminist ethics, and for feminist activism.

goodness. Denial of the 'other' intensifies the categories of 'us' and 'them' and allows the 'self' to further its mission *civilisatrice* and assert its goodness. It also allows my interlocutors to display blatant disbelief at anyone who challenges their exclusionary violent actions and to deny their own status as oppressors. As many of my interlocutors would often exclaim – "*How can we, who are doing such good community work, ever hurt anyone?*" "*Look at how much I do—I run so many events to raise money for the neighbourhood, I volunteer at an orphanage, I help out whenever there is any sort of disaster, how can anyone say I could harm anyone? How can they say that our movement could ever be violent?*"<sup>343</sup>

Third, in a cruel twisted manner, denial through charity allows right-wing women to build a discourse and engage in an affective display/performance of guilt—both of which solidify their 'innate' moral goodness and ethical superiority. For example, much into my fieldwork after I had established some close relationships where I could challenge the views of my interlocutors and push the limits of their arguments, I had a long conversation with Devorah, an old member of Women in Green. I spoke of young boys being arrested in the West Bank and tortured in detention. Devorah denied any such reports, saying, "*We don't kill children, they do*".<sup>344</sup> Instead of keeping quiet, I pushed her a little, pointing to reports from international human rights organizations and media sources that contradicted her denial. She budged, but only a little. She fell quiet and then mournfully said,

There might have been a handful of cases in the last so many decades. But you have to know. It breaks my heart. I am a good woman who does good work in our land. I only want everyone to live and be happy. But they don't let us. So what can I do? Israel has to take action. Even if all we want is to do good things and you can see the amazing

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<sup>343</sup> Fieldnotes, London, UK, 20 October 2014.

<sup>344</sup> Interview with Devorah, Jerusalem, Palestine, 10 September 2014.

## Acknowledgements

In 2007, I was an undergraduate student, spending my days in a nano bio-analytics laboratory. I knew I wanted to be *elsewhere*; I envisioned a life where I studied (and taught) politics and gender; I envisioned *this* life. This thesis has thus, in many ways, been nine years in the making and over this decade I have been immensely grateful for the love and support of several people.

Laleh Khalili has been an excellent PhD supervisor, teacher, and mentor. This thesis would not have been possible without her enthusiasm, her constant encouragement, and her generous pastoral care. She engaged with my work in depth, offered critical feedback, and truly transformed my writing. She has also been incredibly patient and kind, listening to my (ethical) dilemmas, offering advice, solace, and poetry. Her feminist politics, her *ways of doing* academia, and her intellectual rigour and passion are all examples that I can only hope to embrace in the coming years. Francesca Orsini has been incredibly generous and engaged as my second supervisor. She carefully read my chapters and offered a plethora of feedback and comments that have strengthened this thesis. I am thankful for her kindness, her assistance in disentangling the threads of my 'fieldwork' in India, and our discussions on Hindu and Urdu literature. Gina Heathcote has adopted several roles during the last four years. She has been a brilliant third supervisor, going above and beyond her prescribed responsibilities. As research tutor and chair of the Centre for Gender Studies at SOAS, she brought together a diverse group of (anxious) doctoral students and nurtured a shared space for intellectual and feminist solidarities. As a friend and mentor, she offered immeasurable support and encouragement. I am grateful for our conversations and our quiet visits to art exhibitions and museums.

The preliminary ideas for this thesis were shaped in numerous exchanges with my MA dissertation supervisor, Iqbal Singh Sevea; I thank him for his support through the PhD application process. Swati Parashar has been a dear friend and feminist mentor for years; she has widened my engagement with gender and feminist theories; this thesis could not have been written without her guidance and love. Farish Noor has been an incredible mentor since I was an MA student. I take immense inspiration from his work, his approach to teaching, and his engagement with and beyond academia. Farish and his partner, Amy, have also been affectionate friends, opening up their home and lives to me and cheering me along these four years.

There have been four spaces that have been crucial to this thesis. The Centre for Gender Studies (CGS) at SOAS has been *home* for the last four years. I am

work we do. But they make us do these horrible things and it breaks my heart. I pray for them.<sup>345</sup>

In a similar conversation in Mumbai, Veena, a senior member of *Durga Vahini*, once admitted,

Sometimes we have to act with force. We have to show those *mullahs* that we mean business. That we will not tolerate them destroying our country. And in this process, people get hurt. I myself have hurt people and I am not totally proud of it. I am a pious and giving woman. I work hard to spread peace and love. But then they do horrible things to us and I have to protect Hindu India and myself. I feel horrible about having to use violence. It makes me very sad. But it also makes me feel good to know we are doing the right thing. So it is okay. I can live with it.<sup>346</sup>

In both encounters, a display of charity and 'goodness' was seen as reason enough for me—the researcher, the listener, the *outsider*—to accept my interlocutors' guilt, understand their morality and ethical subjectivities, and deny any injury to the 'other' in these narratives.

## 4.6 Conclusion: Breaking Boundaries and Challenging Taboos through Practices of Charity

I'd like to go back to the Introduction to this chapter.

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Shortly after *Ashaji* arrived at the orphanage and adoption centre and finished exchanging pleasantries with the women who worked there, she and

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> Interview with Veena, Thane, India, 11 April 2014.

grateful to Rachel Harrison for encouraging me to apply to CGS. Nadjé Al-Ali, Alyosxa Tudor, Nydia Swaby, Kim Zinnegrebe, and Hila Amit have provided much support, cheer, and comments on drafts/presentations in the last few years. Nadjé and Alyosxa have also guided me as a teacher and offered immense generosity through the years. Nydia, my partner in thesis submission, has been the source of much solidarity, warmth, and laughter through these last few anxious months. I am also grateful to the MA students who have engaged with my work in the classroom and beyond. Sahar, Carole, Salma, Daniel, Abeera, Niharika, Amira, Nadine, Golchehr, Tania, and Sena – thank you. Beyond CGS, SOAS itself has been and will always be *home*. I am grateful to many people at SOAS, but especially to James Eastwood, Sharri Plonski, Meera Sabaratnam, and Kerem Nişancioğlu for not only their support but also for their sustained efforts to ensure that the university is an inclusive, decolonial, and transformative space for *all*.

The Feminist Theory and Gender Studies (FTGS) section of the ISA has been another *home* through these years. Annick Wibben, Caron Gentry, and Sarai Aharoni have been incredible mentors, friends, and colleagues, who have engaged with my work, provided numerous comments, and also been sources of fun and happiness. I am thankful to Simona Sharoni, Laura McLeod, Vivienne Jabri, Ayelet Harel-Shalev, Laura Sjöberg, Megan MacKenzie, Christine Sylvester, Kimberly Hutchings, Cynthia Enloe, Caitlin Ryan, Vlad Naum, and Shine Choi for engaging with different parts of my research. I am also grateful for a set of people who I met through the Gregynog Ideas Lab; Himadeep Muppidi, Sam Opondo, Maria J Mendez Gutierrez, Jenny Edkins, deRaismes Combes, Prithvi Hirani, Danielle Rose House, Yvonne Rinkart, and Erzsébet Strausz, thank you for all the conversations and support, your feedback has been crucial to this thesis.

I remain indebted to my interlocutors for the time they gave me. I am unable to name them for ethical reasons, but I am very grateful to each one of them for sharing their narratives and lives with me. During the fourteen months of ‘fieldwork’ I relied on support from friends and family in India and Israel-Palestine. In India, friends, old and new, were the source of much-needed love and laughter. Wasif Sheikh, Apoorv Misra, Yash Kadam, Rutu Gole, Yasha Ramchandani, Anurag Goswami, Guy Natanel, Anisha George, Shubhra Sinha, Siddharth Vishwanath, Karan Bhalla, Sreshtha Majumdar, and Rushikesh Kulkarni – thank you. I am also thankful to my grandparents for giving me a *home* during my weeks in Delhi. In Israel-Palestine, Dominic Davies, Sarai Aharoni and her family, Ayelet Ben-yishai, Preston Winstead, Micah Bello, Elisa Uusimäki, Elizabeth Kim, Miriam Kallis, and Yamen Elabed were sources of friendship and resistance.

I left to see *her* counselling centre. I followed her out of the door, down the stairs, and in to the grounds of the temple with her children in tow. She led me across the grounds to the other corner of the structure where I saw a big yellow board with bold brown lettering:

**“Chetana Family Counselling Centre – This Centre will try to provide a meaningful direction to your life. We have legal experts and psychiatrists. We will keep your details and problems confidential. We are free.”<sup>347</sup>**

Next to these declarations and disclaimers were the timings when it was open (six days a week, all morning and afternoon) and an illustration that depicted a large open book on which stood a figure of a woman in a sari with her arms upright and raised. Surrounded by two more female heads and raised arms, interlinked in solidarity, the circular figure was painted the same brown on the yellow background. Looking from afar, it was clear that it emphasized education/knowledge through the large open book that grounded the entire symbol; encouraged women’s solidarity and engagement through the female faces and interlinked arms; depicted an urge to *rise upward and outward* with the raised limbs; and appeared as a yellow and bright *sun* figure in totality, shining and glorious.<sup>348</sup> When quizzed about the visual, Ashaji elaborated,

We wanted to ensure that a few things were clear when people look at our logo. We are a women’s organization; women, good traditional Hindu women are doing this work. We are not those left wing types who wear jeans and smoke cigarettes. And that we are serious and educated. We come from a proper educated class and have connections to lawyers and psychologists who can help people.<sup>349</sup>

<sup>347</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 24 February 2014.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid. - The symbol is also present on their pamphlets.

<sup>349</sup> Interview with Asha, New Delhi, India, 24 February 2014.

Love and support from my friends has been indescribable through these years; they have read various drafts of this thesis (and PhD applications!), indulged my rants and elaborations, set shining examples through their own lives and work, and brightened my days in so many ways. Without them, this thesis would never have been completed. Ava Patricia Avila and Kalpana Gopalakrishnan are amazing women and dear friends who inspire me every single day. I am also thankful to Gloria Spittel, Diane Junio, Nona Maniez, Carlina Teteris, Altaf Makhianwala, Drago Zuparic, Kathleen Llewellyn, Meera Gurumurthy, Abhishek Mehrotra, Srilata Sircar, and Shahram Anver for the warmth and the laughter. In London, Anshul Chandra, Nabeel Khalid, Zoya Murtaza, baby Zeest, Ajay Thampi, Shruti Menon, Fouad Asfour, and Gerasimos Tsourapas have added much joy to daily life. Emily Jones, Leyli Behbahani, Shaira Vadasaria, Sharlene Khan, and Akshi Singh have been dear friends, feminist allies, colleagues, and the sources of much strength and love; I treasure their presence in my life. Katie Natanel has been a great friend, mentor, and colleague; I truly cherish her warmth, support, and her engagement with my work; I am galvanized by her research and her commitment to teaching. I am also incredibly thankful to Rahul Rao for his friendship and love; I remain enamoured by his intellect, brilliance, and grace; I treasure our intellectual exchanges, our daily conversations, big and small, and his support through the darkest of times.

There are two *groups* of friends who have made the last four years extremely memorable. Sabiha Allouche, Sruthi Muraleedharan, and Neha Kagal have been partners in PhD writing and feminist activism and have brought much wine, food, laughter, warmth, and love into my life. Sabiha, who sits across from me as I write this, inspires me with her courage, humour, intellect, and feminist anger; I treasure our daily conversations, coffee and cigarette breaks, numerous arguments, and the strong threads of our friendship. Sruthi has been an incredible friend and *co-feministkilljoy* without whom the last few months of writing would have descended into mayhem; I admire her commitment to social justice, scholarship, and teaching and thank her immensely for her friendship and support. Neha has brought much hope and optimism into my dreary outlook towards life; I am grateful for her constant support, friendship, and kindness and inspired by her commitment to making this world a better place. Alexandra Tzirkoti, Pavithra Rallapalli, Deepak Nair, and Rodrigo Torres are the kindest ‘neighbours’ one can ever have. I treasure our weekly dinners, silly board games, numerous conversations, cooking sessions, ‘kitchen time’, travels, and all the warmth, laughter, and love through the last four years. I am also grateful to these four people for reading my thesis, commenting on it, proofing and editing it, and even formatting it, for listening to me talk about my research endlessly, for feeding

We walked down the stairs, through the door near the yellow board, to a dark basement. She switched on the lights and the fans. Looking embarrassed, she hurried to explain,

Sorry it is a little dusty and dark here. But we do our sessions here for particular reasons. We don’t have the money for a better office; the whole thing is run by charity and volunteering, so we must take what we have. And then the basement actually gives some privacy. People can just enter the temple and then come here from *inside* the temple. No one has to see them enter *a counselling centre*. You know how people in India are, *these* sorts of things are a problem, we talk about marriage and depression and family problems here, and so many people think it is shameful to go discuss all these private matters outside the house and if they know you are seeing [a] psychiatrist and all, they think you are mad and mental. That is also why we put everywhere that we are very confidential. We don’t reveal names and all. We are just providing a service for our Hindu community here.<sup>350</sup>

Scholars such as Hansen (1999), Sarkar and Butalia (1998), and Bhatt (2001) have elaborated on the importance of the family unit to the Hindu right-wing project. The family—a traditional heteronormative assembly—is of supreme importance to Hindu right-wing women as well, so much so, that women who devote their *entire* lives to the movement fashion themselves as traditional-family-less subjects. My Hindu right-wing interlocutors, although subscribing to these formations, also push their boundaries and negotiate them—challenging the larger (and male-formulated) discourse of Hindutva in crucial ways. In *Section 6.4*, I elaborated on the work of Sadhvi Rithambara who simultaneously subscribes to a belief in the sanctity of family units while

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid.



me and ensuring that I always had lots of coffee and chocolate, and for taking care of me during these last few months and more.

Finally, there are a few people without whom I would not be sitting here and writing this document. My partner's family – Lakshmi, Lakshminarayana, and Tara – have showered me with immense affection, kindness, and support through these four years. Aparna Nambiar has been a dear friend for more than a decade, inspiring me and shaping everything I have done since I was an undergraduate; I treasure her friendship and the depth and ease of our intellectual and emotional exchanges. My parents, Binty and Nalin, have never hinted that there was something I couldn't do or someone I couldn't be. They filled my life and our home with friends, books, music, films, travel, globes, and much more. Their support, love, and sacrifices have been invaluable; their hard work is the reason I am able to live a life that makes me happy and for that I am eternally grateful. My sister, Akriti Mehta, has not only been a source of love, friendship, inspiration, and intellectual exchanges for most of my life but she has also read and edited this entire thesis. She has indulged me through these four years and more and she means the world to me. I will always be grateful for her help through this last month of writing and I am amazed by her compassion and strength every day. My partner, Roy, moved to London so I could pursue this PhD. Through these four years, he has been an intellectual companion, travel buddy, editor, tech expert, research assistant, best friend, and a terrific partner; he has been the closest to the intricacies of the writing process, listening to me, cheering me on, putting up with my meltdowns, looking after me, celebrating finished chapters, and pushing me to write in moments of despair. I admire his kindness and generosity, his humility, and his eternal (and sometimes annoying) curiosity towards the world. He has transformed our tiny flat into a welcoming home for our friends, our foster pets, and us. I thank and love him with all my heart.

challenging the formation of these units. Practices of charity and the production of 'moral' subjects, I argue, facilitate these negotiations in three more ways. I will elaborate on these now.

First, as the narrative of *Ashaji* tells us, much to the chagrin of many traditional Hindu nationalist leaders, taboo topics of the 'private'—like marital disputes, infidelity, psychological problems in the family, infertility, divorce and separation, sexual issues, emotional health of parents and children, stress and anxiety, and mental illness and depression—are finding a space within women's right-wing politics. Anupama, a colleague of Asha, elaborated on this,

When we first, many many years ago put together the idea of this counselling centre, no one would support us. The finance committee looked at us as if we were joking and we were shameless idiots. So we had to re-frame everything. We told them this was a centre to help people firm up their family values and beliefs. We told them we were going to help couples make a strong Hindu marriage and raise children with good beliefs. Then they said but we already have temples and guidance seminars and all for that. So we had to come up with more excuses.<sup>351</sup>

*Ashaji* picked up on this. She sighed and said,

We had to then tell them that not all couples wanted to talk about all this at temples and that seminars and temples were very one-way. We also wanted to learn from our community and let the community serve each other. This was acceptable to them. Suddenly they saw some value in what we were doing.<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> Interview with Anupama, New Delhi, India, 26 February 2014.

<sup>352</sup> Interview with Asha, New Delhi, India, 26 February 2014.

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Continuing, Anupama added,

So they gave us some funding and a small space and we started, slowly and slowly we grew into this—a place where people can come discuss things they are not allowed to discuss. Where they can feel like they are getting counselling and therapy without feeling ashamed of it. Where they can feel like they are Hindu and yet modern.<sup>353</sup>

This conversation highlights the tensions within the project. It, more importantly, demonstrates cunning and strategic efforts by women to frame these points of difference and disguise them. By constructing and performing a certain type of subjecthood—one that was not *entirely* at odds with what was demanded of them but was still transformed and agential—charitable ventures necessitated that right-wing women evolve and adapt their practices and discourses. Recognising that "*societies and families are changing and we must change with them*", my interlocutors not only defied and even duped male leaders (and keepers of the budget) but also were immensely successful in their initiative—so much so, that they no longer needed to hide what their practices were doing.<sup>354</sup> The large board outside their space made it clear that *were* challenging ideologies and breaking taboos. Their negotiations, now, a decade after the first opened *shop*, ensured their work was accepted if not entirely appreciated.

Second, going back to the elaborations on Hindutva women's charitable efforts in *Section 6.4*, I re-assert that the very *presence* of Hindu right-wing women as first responders at sites of violence and disasters highlighted their transformation of gender norms and their subversions of Hindu nationalist gender regimes. Traditionally confined to 'domestic' practices of charity—

<sup>353</sup> Interview with Anupama, New Delhi, India, 26 February 2014.

<sup>354</sup> Interview with Asha, New Delhi, India, 25 February 2014.

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setting up kitchens, dealing with food, organization and fundraising *within* the neighbourhood, providing online support—in recent years, women had challenged the gendered boundaries of what was acceptable and unacceptable; private and public. By *showing up*, strategizing, persevering, adapting, and constructing themselves as capable ‘good’ subjects, they made room for themselves as those publically *visible*—even in ‘dangerous’ and ‘unstable’ conditions of disaster relief and conflict. By running and organizing charitable efforts, they moved from being symbolic maternal figures in brochure imagery to those that are not only the face but also the embodiment and *bosses* of Hindutva charity.

Third, I argue that by accepting *and* incorporating ideas around neoliberalism in specifically gendered ways, women were challenging the entire oeuvre of Hindu nationalism’s traditional charity and humanitarian work. To elaborate, Hindutva politics has been hospitable to neoliberalism and its discourses of ‘development’ for decades. Hindu right-wing women have drawn on this acceptance and isolated certain gendered ideas within neoliberalism such as the empowerment of women through corporations/corporate employment, encouraging women to focus on (certain) careers/jobs, female contribution to work force and household income, and a slight increase in the normative age for marriage and having children. They have incorporated these ideas into their charitable practices and now hold sessions on career counselling, employment, job applications etc. in their camps, pedagogical spaces, and volunteer centres. These services are volunteer-led and are often conducted in disagreement with male and older members of the project.<sup>355</sup> As Geeta, who runs a career counselling session for *Durga Vahini* in Mumbai, asserted,

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<sup>355</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 28 April 2014.

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The older uncles [men] get angry with us for doing these kinds of services, but we want to make sure women know how to make these choices. We want to provide them with information and training and help them become successful in their work also. This is how the world is now. So why shouldn't our work have space for it?<sup>356</sup>

Thus, women's charitable practices and the expansion and transformation of their type and scope, once again, become key sites for disagreement and bargaining within the right-wing.

To look for connections between the two sets of my interlocutors, I'd also like to explore the negotiations undertaken by Zionist settler women through their charitable efforts.

Like my Hindu right-wing interlocutors, settler women are also increasingly including *taboo* topics that have been traditionally hushed and overlooked. While I did not hear any mention of mental health counselling, discussions on family, marriage, and children and counselling around them have been recently included in their community service initiatives. An interesting example of this is the inclusion of spirituality-inspired counselling for soldiers' wives ("*How to use Judaism to deal with your husband's absence when he goes to war*") alongside existing material practices of service to soldiers and the families they leave *behind*.<sup>357</sup> Nadia, in a conversation about this, told me that men in the organization, including her husband and brothers, felt that "*marriage was a private matter and need not be discussed so openly*".<sup>358</sup> They did not like the session and were also disapproving of counselling on sex and sexuality among (married) women. However, in spite of this discountenance

<sup>356</sup> Interview with Geeta, Mumbai, India, 18 April 2014.

<sup>357</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 15 September 2014.

<sup>358</sup> Conversation with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 4 September 2014.

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Nadia and other members of Women in Green continued to hold sessions and facilitate social work and service around these *taboo* topics. Nadia informed me that they even raised funds specifically for these subjects and a lot of women in the settler communities of Southern West Bank supported them; offering money, spaces to meet, food and snacks for the gatherings, and even a plethora of topics to discuss.<sup>359</sup>

While for Hindu right-wing women, *visibility* in sites of danger has been a fairly recent thing; public presence on the *frontier* with all its ‘instability’ has been an integral part of Zionist settler women’s history. With regards to this, negotiations are thus not about the private/public divide but about the *appropriate* amount of time and effort spent carrying out these actions vis-à-vis that spent on religious and familial duties. Lastly, like Hindu right-wing women, a recent focus on charitable work that focuses on *empowering* women through neoliberal ideas of employment has seeped into the corners of settler women’s activism. It manifests through efforts to prepare women for interviews, provide career guidance, organise study groups for girls in school and university as well as through organising group childcare, creative sessions for children, and rosters for baby-sitting, carpooling, and play dates.<sup>360361</sup> However, these efforts are nascent and not developed and institutionalised enough (yet) and are met with hostility from male and older female settler activists for whom motherhood and community remain more crucial than *a career in the city*.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 15 September 2014.

<sup>361</sup> Interestingly, this evokes the imagery of the kibbutz with its *Beit Yeladim* (House for the children) and shared childcare arrangements.

<sup>362</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 15 September 2014.

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Finally, I find it pertinent to mention that while both—Hindu right-wing women and Zionist settler women—negotiate the *rules* and boundaries of their larger projects through their consistent charitable efforts that fashion new subject positions, in several ways my interlocutors continue to embrace and reinforce these boundaries. While some rigidities are being broken and some bargains are being put forth successfully, there exist limits to the negotiations of right-wing women. Heteronormativity; a focus on the family; modesty in sexuality, appearance, and etiquette; the significance of motherhood as an equal to womanhood are all enforced through mechanisms of exclusion, neglect, punishment, and disregard. While mental illnesses are being discussed, only certain types of symptoms and behaviour are acceptable.<sup>363</sup> While career counselling is being *mainstreamed*, only certain *respectable* careers that are not at odds with family life and societal standards of respectability are acceptable. In other words, the *new* norms formulated by my interlocutors come with their constraints too. Through the same mechanisms of disciplining, governing, punishing, rewarding, and self-fashioning within their communities the bargains, negotiations, and agential actions of right-wing women are also policed. I write this not to undermine the efforts and transformative potential of right-wing women's politics within their communities but to remind myself of the several limitations of these spaces and practices of charity.

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This chapter has examined the role of charitable practices in the production of right-wing women's subjectivities. Through ethnographic narratives it has argued that Hindu right-wing and Zionist settler women construct themselves as 'good' and 'moral' subjects through quotidian and 'special' acts

<sup>363</sup> Among Zionist settler women, mental illness and sexual abuse are simply not discussed.



## Introduction: Where are the Right-Wing Women?<sup>1</sup>

*“Local women said; no matter  
how you sprinkled it, every time  
You’d sweep a concrete floor;  
you’d get more off it.  
As if, deep down,  
There was only dust”*

- John O’Donohue (2000:99)  
“Wings” in: *Conamara Blues*

*“Perhaps it’s true that things can change in a day. That a few dozen hours can affect  
the outcome of whole lifetimes. And that when they do, those few dozen hours, like  
the salvaged remains of a burned house—the charred clock, the singed photograph,  
the scorched furniture—must be resurrected from the ruins and examined.  
Preserved. Accounted for. Little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted.  
Imbued with new meaning. Suddenly they become the bleached bones of a story.”*

- Arundhati Roy (1997:32-33)  
*The God of Small Things*

of charity and service. Practices of charity are gendered and render my interlocutors *visible* in their communities, allowing them to devise norms of ‘goodness’ and ‘govern’ other women (and men). They also become means of justifying violence and assist in the denial and erasure of the ‘other’. Furthermore, charity mediates right-wing women’s bargains and negotiations and offers a site of gendered transgressions with the layers of patriarchy and domination within their larger projects. By delving into the nuances of both—the Hindu right wing and the Zionist settler project—one after the other, I not only offer considerable depth into the formation of my interlocutors’ subjectivities in both geographies, but I also flesh out the convergences and divergences between women’s politics in these two movements. Lastly, this chapter has highlighted how right-wing women’s charitable practices *fill in* for the state and the state’s welfare while at the same time mediating “technologies of the self” that constitute individual subjects as responsible for their own security, ethics, goodness, and morality, communities, and lives (Foucault, 1988). My interlocutors’ practices of charity, thus, facilitate the production of neoliberal subjectivities and societies without the intervention of the state.

<sup>1</sup> I attribute this question to Cynthia Enloe’s (1989) question – *Where are the women?*

### 1.1 Two Narratives; Two Right-Wing Projects; Multiple Questions

On Monday, 30 June 2014, the Israeli state announced that *Operation Brother's Keeper* had come to a tragic end.<sup>2</sup> The (brutal) military effort to locate Naftali Frenkel, Gilad Shaer, and Ayal Yifrah had concluded; the bodies of the three teenage boys had been found in a field northwest of Hebron in the West Bank, Palestine; approximately one thousand Palestinian homes had been raided and three hundred and twenty civilians had been arrested.<sup>3</sup> Frenkel, Shaer, and Yifrah had been kidnapped on 12 June 2014 from a bus stop opposite the Israeli settlement of Gush Etsyon in the West Bank; they were hitchhiking to their homes. The Israeli state vowed a tough response to the killings and subsequently launched *Operation Protective Edge*, the 2014 assault on Gaza. Nadia Matar, one of the two leaders of the Zionist settler women's organization, Women in Green, tearfully elaborated during our first meeting that she, as an Israeli, as a woman, as a Zionist, and as a mother, had been praying for the safety of *our boys*; the news of their death shattered her completely. She cried for hours; she embraced her family; she held hands with other women in the organization, praying fervently.<sup>4</sup>

Women in Green, established after the Oslo Accords by Nadia and her mother-in-law Ruth Matar and officially known as Women for Israel's Tomorrow, was an active settler women's organization in the Southern West Bank (from the Gush Etsyon block to Hebron and the settlement of *Kiryat Arba*). As night fell on that Monday, Nadia, her co-leader Yehudit Katsover, and several other members of Women in Green collected in Nadia's home. They had decided that they needed to formulate *their own* Zionist response to

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<sup>2</sup> See the news report by Eglash & Branigin (2014) in *The Washington Post* - <http://wapo.st/2cG6uAm>

<sup>3</sup> For more on the violation of Palestinian rights during the Operation, see - <http://bit.ly/2cz9bVd>

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 8 August 2014.

## 5

### Affective Politics: Joyful Intimacy and Right-Wing Women

#### 5.1 Introduction: A Family of Five and More

Ever since I was a child, I never felt like I was part of a community in my home country. I was never accepted and never loved. My choices were always criticized. *Here*, I am part of something—a movement—and also a group of people who *really* care about my family and about me. We live together, we pray together, we celebrate our happy times together, and we are there for each other, *every single day*. Yes *they* are trying to kill us—those that don't want us here. But, you know what – *they* cannot kill *our happiness*. They *cannot* kill our loving spirit.

- (Ruth) Malka Abraham, Kiryat Arba<sup>364</sup>

In August 2014, when I began to spend time with my Zionist settler interlocutors in the Southern West Bank, not a day would go by when someone did not mention *the Abrahams* to me. Looking at the colour of my skin and the way I dressed and confirming that I indeed was from India (and Bombay, nonetheless), my interlocutors would excitedly ask – *Have you met Dr Abraham and his lovely family yet?* On a Friday morning as *we* wrapped up Women in Green's morning pedagogical event at the outpost-settlement of Givat Oz V'Gaon, Sarai suggested that she and I should head to *the Kiryat* to see the Abrahams. I did not even take a second to say yes!<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> Conversation with Malka, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 28 August 2014.

<sup>365</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 15 August 2014.



this “heinous act by the Arabs”.<sup>5</sup> As Nadia elaborated in an interview with me in August 2014,

*We had to do something.* The government and Netanyahu promised all kinds of responses, but who knew if they would carry on with them? Netanyahu makes all kinds of promises. This was not about government-related politics; it was about *us*, Zionist women who live in *Judea* and *Samaria*; we are the ones who face these deaths and these losses every single day. We live under threats; our children die; we had the power to change things. So after we finished crying, we had to *do something*, quickly and strongly.<sup>6</sup>

That same Monday night, they set out and arrived at Gush Etsyon junction, where the boys had been abducted. They found a small hill—a short climb from the junction—and decided to *reclaim* it. Sarai, an active member of the organization who lives in the settlement of *Kiryat Arba* near Hebron, elaborated,

The hill belongs to Israel, of course, but had been taken over by Arabs. There was trash everywhere on the hill—the lovely trees and beautiful nature was surrounded by the garbage and the plastic *these Arabs* throw. There was animal excrement everywhere. Weeds were growing everywhere, taking over the place. Stones and rocks were everywhere. There was a house in the middle of the hill and it was absolutely filthy. The Arabs had ruined this land, as they *always* do.<sup>7</sup>

Women in Green decided that their “Zionist response to the Arabs and the killings of the three boys” would be to *take over* and *re-claim* this land that

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 8 August 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Sarai, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 28 August 2014.

The Abrahams were a family of five from India who had moved to Israel and the settlement of Kiryat Arba, outside Hebron, in 2009. A middle-aged man, who I only knew as Dr Abraham, was the patriarch of the family. Referred to as *the Doctor*, he was kind and fatherly to me when we met; taking out time to speak to me about his *lives* in India and Israel and offering me advice, often unsolicited, on all kinds of topics—from my spiritual growth to my marriage and health. His wife Malka—whose Hebrew name was a literal translation of her Indian name Rani (Queen) —was a few years younger than him and she too welcomed me into her home and daily life.<sup>366</sup> *Daak* (Doc), as she called her husband, didn’t talk much about Bombay with her anymore. Elaborating on this, she lamented,

I feel more at home here because I can practice my faith easily, but I do miss talking about those old places and streets that I have left behind in India.<sup>367</sup>

Malka grew up in a Protestant family in Southern India. She met *Daak* when she was a young nurse in a small clinic in Northern India. *Daak* was a *handsome* Hindu doctor at the same clinic and he would walk around the workplace with a Bible in his hands, reading the text in all his spare time. She was intrigued. Dr Abraham laughed when he recalled the time and confessed that he never did make it past the Old Testament; he found all the answers he was looking for in those pages.<sup>368</sup>

Sarai and I met *the Doctor* in a café in the settlement. He insisted on buying us coffee and pastries and sat down to talk to me. A little into our conversation, he elaborated,

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<sup>366</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem and Kiryat Arba, Palestine, 15, 24, and 28 August 2014.

<sup>367</sup> Conversation with Malka, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 28 August 2014.

<sup>368</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 15 August 2014.

“had been occupied by the Arabs” and “tend it and nurture it with love and devotion”.<sup>8</sup> Zionist settler women spent the next four weeks *cleaning* this site; they uprooted the weeds, stones, and rocks; they collected garbage; they vacuumed, mopped, and swept the *house*, scrubbing floors, walls, and windows; they pruned the trees and plants. They also *transformed* this site; they planted *new* trees; they placed benches, tables, and chairs around the hill; they created a picnic area as well as a play area for children, complete with colourful swings, slides, a jungle gym, and outdoor toys; they converted the house/room into a café-library, equipping it with coffee machines, a pantry, a few tables and chairs, and bookshelves with religious and political books. Women began to spend nights (and days) and Sabbath at the hill; tents and camps sprouted up; sanitation facilities, a water supply, toilets, and bathrooms were installed; electricity, lights and lamps, and Wi-Fi Internet was made available. Women in Green began to hold all its meetings at this hill, using it for educational sessions like lectures as well as an organizational base for their activities in the Southern West Bank; a microphone and speaker system was installed alongside work desks, office chairs, and cupboards full of stationery supplies. Israeli flags were placed all around the hill; a handful of soldiers and a military vehicle began to guard it; banners and posters of Women in Green were nailed to the walls and trees; a permanent table with pamphlets, brochures, and merchandise found a corner.

The *community* grew with every day; by July over a hundred women embraced this site, some spending all their time there, others visiting at least once a day and staying the occasional night and Sabbath. A bomb shelter was built; the path to the hill from the point where the boys were abducted was adorned with flowers and pebbles; massive road signs with pictures and

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 8 August 2014.

I came from a pure Hindu Brahmin family—we have priestly blood—but when I was a young boy I was just so disgusted to see my father pray to idols. I asked my father – how *could* you think that there is anything holy or spiritual in these tiny figures made of mud? My father had no answers and would just tell me to follow these beliefs without questioning them. Then, later, when I was a medical student, I was posted to work for a few months in some very remote and backward villages in Central India. Most of the patients were from lower Hindu castes and when they came to see me they would just refuse to sit near me. They knew I was upper caste and they had always thought of themselves as low and filthy creatures, who could *just* not sit near a Brahmin. When I told them that I didn’t care about caste and they *can* and should sit next to me and let me examine them, they *just would not* believe me. The Hindu caste system was *so* deep within them; they actually believed they and their bodies were less than me. This was the *reality* of Hinduism. You tell me? How *could* I stand this religion of Hinduism after this? It did not give me any answers about life; it just disgusted me.<sup>369</sup>

Dr Abraham *found answers* in Judaism, and by the mid-1990s, he was a practicing Jew. He elaborated,

We officially only converted in 2008 as we had *so* many hurdles to cross, but by the 1990s we were following everything the religion told us. We kept kosher – can you imagine, in India where yoghurt and chicken make the best dishes? We kept Sabbath and we followed other rules of the faith and prayer. Initially, Malka was very hesitant; after all she was Christian. But after she started learning about Judaism and all

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<sup>369</sup> Conversation with Dr Abraham, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 15 August 2014.

lighting were erected (See Figure 1.1). By August 2014, when I arrived in Israel-Palestine, the hill (also referred to as a forest, nature reserve, שמורת) was the centre of Zionist settler women's politics. A Palestinian hill was now a Zionist outpost-settlement, *occupied* by settler women; in the memory of Shaer, Frenkel, and Yifrah (and using the first letters of their names Gilad, Ayal, and Naftali), they re-named this space, *Givat Oz V'Gaon*, גבעת עוז וגאון, the hill of strength/daring/bravery and pride/glory/greatness.



Figure 1.1: A Sign for the Outpost-Settlement <sup>9</sup>

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In late October 2013, I made my way to a meeting of the Hindu right-wing organization *Durga Vahini* (The Army of Durga) in northwest Mumbai. It was my first meeting at this *shakha* (branch) of the Mumbai chapter of the organization. My interlocutor Geeta, who I had met through Veena, a *Durga Vahini* member in the nearby city/suburb of Thane, urged me to attend this meeting; she promised to introduce me to other members, her dear friends; she also affirmed that it would be a *fun* experience. The *shakha* was in a small

<sup>9</sup> Photograph taken by author on 8 August 2014.

that it *taught*, she accepted it with all her heart. We decided to raise our three children within the faith. Shmuel is our oldest one; he lives with us. Sarah is our eldest daughter—you *must* Google her—she represents Israel in kickboxing; and Shona is the youngest one—we call her *Little Flower* because she is our little flower.<sup>370</sup>

In the 2000s, the Abraham family lived in affluent South Mumbai where they became fixtures in the local Jewish community—a mix of members of the Chabad movement and Jewish travellers.<sup>371</sup> They attended the Chabad synagogue and convinced the Rabbi and his wife—stationed at the Chabad house in South Mumbai—to facilitate their official conversion and guide their spiritual paths. They felt isolated in India – raising a Jewish family in a country with a miniscule Jewish population; they found it difficult to follow the tenets of *halakhah* (Jewish religious laws) in a city like Mumbai. However, they also felt *special* and beloved, as they had found a community of fellow-believers in “a sea of Hindus”.<sup>372</sup> *The Doctor*, at the time, headed the Intensive/Critical Care Unit at one of the best hospitals in India—Breach Candy. He walked his rounds wearing his *kippah* and *tallit katan*.<sup>373</sup> In late 2008, the life of the Abrahams changed drastically.

In the multiple terrorist attacks in Mumbai in late November 2008, the Chabad house was one of the six major targets of the militants. Holding the inhabitants of the house hostage, two militants engaged in a fierce gun-battle with Indian security forces. The militants killed the Rabbi and his wife along with six others present at the house. The young nanny saved the family's one-

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> For more on the Chabad Movement see their website - <http://www.chabad.org/>

<sup>372</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem and Kiryat Arba, Palestine, 15, 24, and 28 August 2014.

<sup>373</sup> A *kippah* is a brimless cloth cap worn by religious Jewish males to fulfill the orthodox requirement of covering one's hair at all times. A *tallit katan* is a fringed garment worn by religious Jewish males under or over their clothes.

one-bedroom apartment in a residential building; a large sign with the name and logo of the organization hung outside and I was asked to remove my shoes, enter, and make myself at home. Inside the hall/living room, chairs and mattresses were arranged in a circular fashion and portraits of the organisation's ideologues and adopted mythological characters adorned the walls. Women members began to arrive, and soon, Aastha, the elected head of the branch, brought the meeting to order.<sup>10</sup>

After a short prayer to the appropriated Mother Goddess, *Bharat Mata*, the Hindu right-wing women assembled in this small space embarked on their agenda for the day. First, matters related to an upcoming event—a charity drive for a nearby woman's shelter—were discussed; logistical details were etched out and a budget was drawn. Second, current affairs and news from the last week was dissected; opinions were flung and voices raised; the country was going to *hell* thanks to the Muslims, Christians, and *anti-national* forces, my interlocutors concluded. Third, the main reason for this particular meeting was finally brought up. That afternoon the women were to discuss a new book by the founder of the organization, Sadhvi Rithambara. The book, published in Hindi in mid-2013 by Rithambara's own press was titled, *Jaagon, Bharat ki Nari*, Rise, Women of India. I was given a copy of the tiny book and I flipped through the pages as the discussion commenced. A photograph of Rithambara—speaking into a microphone, her arms gesticulating—was on the front cover; the forty-five pages were a mix of prose and poetry about the power, responsibilities, and potential of the Hindi woman (See Figure 1.2).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 15 October 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

year-old son by running with him to safety. The boy, Moshe, and the nanny now reside in Israel with the nanny having been conferred Israeli citizenship. The Abrahams visit them often.<sup>374</sup> As we sat on a set of swings in a garden in Kiryat Arba, Malka recalls that time, crying softly,

For us that was the darkest day in our lives. I was at home, watching the news about the early attacks – the attacks were just starting and the news had started to come in, and it was just so shocking to hear this was happening. But *not even for a moment* could I have thought how much worse it was going to get. I *could not even begin to think* that our lives were going to shatter so completely. When the news came in that the Chabad house was one of the targets, I could not breathe. I was panicking and crying, unable to think. Daak and I tried to call the Rabbi—desperately—but then it was confirmed on the television. They were dead. *They killed us. Even* in India, away from Israel, they *found us*, Jews, and they executed our community, our leaders, our guides, *us*.<sup>375</sup>

In the wake of the killings, the Abrahams, grieving as they were, became crucial to one geo-political aftermath of the attacks. Dr Abraham elaborated on this as we drove to Jerusalem one evening. He said,

The government of India wanted to conduct autopsies on the murdered Jews. They did not know that in Judaism it is forbidden to cut the skin of a person; even a razor has to be blunt. They would not listen to me or Malka and they kept on dismissing us saying that I was not a real Jew. But of course, I had to stand up for my community. I was heartbroken and angry and I knew what was right. So for three whole days, Malka and I sat by the dead bodies of our beloved Rabbi, his wife, and the other Jewish people killed in that attack; we guarded

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<sup>374</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 15 August 2014.

<sup>375</sup> Conversation with Malka, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 14 September 2014.

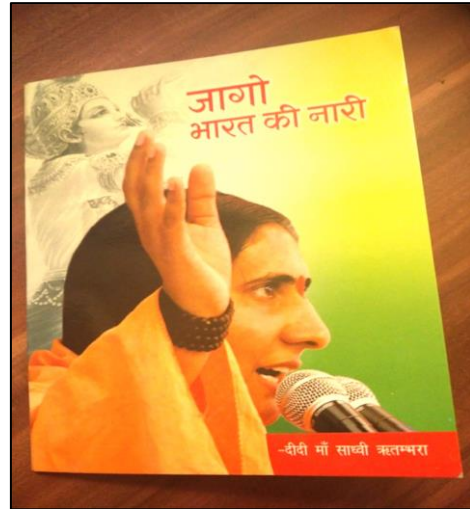


Figure 1.2- *Jaago, Bharat ki Nari - Rise, Women of India*<sup>12</sup>

We were given a few minutes to (re)read the text and then Aastha asked everyone to voice their opinions and highlight their favourite paragraphs. I stayed silent, listening; my interlocutor Geeta went third; she read out a paragraph towards the end of the book. Translated into English, the text said,

I am in search of the kind of woman who has the strength and courage to keep *Hindu values* alive, values that have been mercilessly erased and diluted. I want *us* to find the kind of empowerment that is based on the deep power of women, *Nari Shakti*. A woman should embrace new ideas and novel ways of living in this world but she must not forget where she came from. To lead the chariot that *Bharat Mata* rides and to continue the legacy of our foremothers, I am looking for the graceful woman who will nurture her warrior body and its bravery while also ensuring the beauty of her mind and intellect (Rithambara, 2013:45).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The book written by Sadhvi Rithambara (2013) was procured on 15 October 2013. Image taken by author on 18 September 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 15 October 2013.

*our* dead. We refused to let *anyone* touch them or even get close to them until the Israeli officials could come and take the bodies to Israel. We fought them with our hands if they tried to come in. They even sent the police. We sat there—day and night, mourning and crying, *our lives* and *our* community was lost and gone forever. We only had these bodies left and we had to watch over them to preserve our values even in this horrible time.<sup>376</sup>

Shattered by this violence, the family appealed and pleaded the religious leaders and the Israeli state to hasten their official conversion so they could make *aaliyah* to Israel. In early 2009, months after their lives changed, the family of five left their home in South Mumbai and moved to the settlement of *Kiryat Arba*, outside Hebron. As Dr Abraham said, “*we moved just above the holy site of Cave of the Patriarchs, so near to everything close to the heart*”.<sup>377</sup>

On a Sunday morning, I waited for Malka to get dressed so we could go for one of our usual strolls around the settlement. I looked around their home. I had been visiting them a few times and had many meals in their home. Every meal started with Malka apologising for their bare and untidy home. They lived on the second floor of a building near the centre of the settlement. It was an ordinary stone building, in a row of many. As you climbed up the staircase, nearing their apartment, clothes began to appear on the railings. Soon, you encountered an old refrigerator, an old washing machine, several stacks of books, medical journals and newspapers, and piles of assorted *junk* that you had to skilfully avoid when you made your way to their door. The door itself was adorned with ceramic *mezuzot* on both sides.<sup>378</sup> The living room was shabby—pieces of mismatched furniture, torn sofas, old family

<sup>376</sup> Conversation with Dr Abraham, Route 60, West Bank, Palestine, 30 August 2014.

<sup>377</sup> Conversation with Dr Abraham, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 15 August 2014.

<sup>378</sup> Mezuzah (plural: mezuzot) is a piece of parchment inscribed with Hebrew verses from the Torah.

Geeta highlighted that she really valued this particular paragraph as it spoke about *Nari Shakti*, the power of the woman, an idea she embraced wholeheartedly. She elaborated,

We keep hearing about feminism and empowerment of women everywhere. The problem is when those outside India, in *Western* countries, and those who are left-wingers in India talk about feminism and female empowerment, they talk about *Nari Mukti*, the freedom of women. They talk about *free* women who abandon their families for careers, who drink and smoke, who wear disgraceful clothes, and who behave in disrespectful ways. *We* are not *these* women. *These* women are not like *us*. What Sadhvi Rithambara is discussing in this book is also women's empowerment, but it is our kind of empowerment and even our kind of feminism, even though I *really* hate that word. It is *Nari Shakti*, the power of a woman. A woman doesn't have to be *free* in all those other ways to be powerful. We focus on her deep-rooted power, her ability to *do things*, to live, to *change* society, to help her family grow, to help herself grow, to *transform* the country, and to build and maintain the *Hindu* nation. *Nari Shakti* not *Nari Mukti*—that is the key message. And the other message is the importance of both—the body and the mind.<sup>14</sup>

The women in the room appreciated Geeta's comments; they nodded and cheered; the discussion changed its direction. My interlocutors now began to discuss the nuances of *Nari Shakti*, the power of the woman. They listed out the characteristics of the empowered woman; they drew out attributes of the empowered woman from Rithambara's book; they discussed how the empowered woman could be useful to the *Hindu* land and change the fate of

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<sup>14</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 15 October 2013.

photographs, posters of their daughter Sarah's kickboxing championships, a dining table that barely stood, religious symbols and scripture books abundant. Adjacent was a kitchen that followed the rules of kosher and produced delicious Indian food. On the other side of these rooms were two bedrooms that I never saw.<sup>379</sup> Malka, embarrassed about her sparse and decaying home, lamented,

We lived a very good life in Mumbai—*those were the days*. South Bombay, the beach, my husband the head doctor of a prestigious hospital, me a successful nurse, a beautiful apartment on Marine Drive—we had it all. But we left everything to come here. I know we made the *absolutely* right decision and the community helped us in every way they could but you know we are struggling here in many ways. I feel at home, yes, but it is not easy.<sup>380</sup>

In 2009, when the Abrahams arrived in Israel, they were *given* this *small* apartment by the state and were also provided an allowance to settle down and raise their children. They still get an allowance from the state, albeit a smaller one. Malka and Dr Abraham's medical and nursing licenses were not valid in Israel and *the Doctor* decided to re-take part of his training and exams in order to be eligible to practice medicine. Malka, meanwhile, focused on the children. As Malka and I walked around the settlement, many women stopped to greet and hug her. Malka recalled,

Those were *very very* hard years. We had very little money and we didn't know many people; actually we didn't know *any* people. But the people in the community—this community, *our* community—were so kind and amazing. They were *so* helpful and they *really really* cared about us. For almost two years—*two long years*—when Daak was

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<sup>379</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 14 September 2014.

<sup>380</sup> Conversation with Malka, Kiryat Arba, Palestine, 14 September 2014.



this country. They also discussed how they all could ensure that *they* were *this* empowered woman and how their branch and organization could nurture their strong bodies and intellects. An hour and a half had passed since I had arrived and I had filled pages after pages with *fieldnotes*. The women stood up, slowly, and began to move to the corner of the room; they continued chatting. A helper had placed little glasses of hot milky tea and a row of snacks on a table at the corner of the room. The strictly educational part of the meeting had concluded with the arrival of refreshments; the discussions continued, interrupted by friendly catching-up, laughter, and socialization. We were free to leave; no one left.<sup>15</sup>

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For decades, women in right-wing movements had been kept at the periphery in both scholarly and popular narratives that largely ignored them as historically and politically significant (Bedi, 2006). Feminist scholars across disciplines found themselves in conflict with women's participation in right-wing movements as these projects subscribe to patriarchal ideologies and structures that feminism is trying to contest (Koonz, 1986). However, the diverse participation of women in right-wing movements and the increasing number of women who join these organizations implied that scholars could no longer ignore the *problem* of right-wing women (Pateman, 1989). This *problem forced* several feminist scholars to re-evaluate feminism's conflicted relationship with the right. However, it prompted *examinations* of right-wing women that were dominantly grounded in notions of *vigilance* and the *countering* of right-wing women (Gardiner, 1995; Sarkar & Butalia, 1998).

These dominant analyses that focus on *combating* the *problem* of right-wing women neglect that women's participation in the right-wing opens up arenas

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<sup>15</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 15 October 2013.

training and taking exams again, and we had no income except what the government gave us. People took care of us. People of Kiryat Arba made sure we were okay. Every week, bags full of groceries would arrive at our house—food, fruits, vegetables, meat, wine, rice, *everything* we needed. For two years, we had an invitation for Sabbath meals; every meal was taken care of. We *never* felt alone. People gave us whatever furniture and items they were not using, some even bought us new things. Neighbours and everyone in the community spent hours helping us with Hebrew and taking us to places because we didn't have a car. It is not like these people are rich, you know, but they became family. They fed us, they listened to our problems, they helped us relax as a family—we had outings, we went to places for the kids to see and play and we felt *so* happy. They also helped *me* settle down here—in my new life—and meet other women, so I could enjoy this new life.<sup>381</sup>

After acquiring his medical license in Israel, the only job available to Dr Abraham was in Bnei Brak, a city near Tel Aviv that was the centre of ultra-orthodox Judaism. As he explained,

No one wants to work in Bnei Brak as it is not a great place—very crowded and ultra-orthodox—but I didn't have a choice. So I took the job and I am still doing it. Four days a week I go there and work and then I come back to our home in *the Kiryat* and sometimes take a shift or two at the local clinic. Hopefully something will open up here in Kiryat Arba for me that is full time. If the clinic gets more funds, then maybe. I really don't want to move to Tel Aviv, as it is important for me—from a religious and ideological perspective—to be in *this* land –

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<sup>381</sup> Conversation with Malka, Kiryat Arba, Palestine, 14 September 2014.

for public and political participation by women (Bedi, 2006). They concluded that women in the right-wing were *victims* and *not agents*, constructing the right as a singular project that stands against feminism, a monolithic entity, and liberation, a homogenized experience (Moghadam, 1994; Bacchetta & Power, 2002; Bedi, 2006). They ignore the heterogeneity of the right (and of *feminisms*) and the diverse ideologies they stem from, the variety of discourses they employ, and the multiplicities of their political engagement (ibid.). They neglect the everyday politics of right-wing women and the complexities, contradictions, subversions, and resistance that constitute and are constituted by their subjectivities (MacKinnon, 1987; Tong, 1998; Bacchetta & Power, 2002; Bedi, 2006). Moreover, while these works engage with a few themes, they deploy the overarching and overbearing lens of the maternal and the familial to interrogate right-wing women, marginalizing a plethora of right-wing women's activisms and mobilization.

The two narratives I presented at the beginning of this section do not find space in this dominant literature. Zionist settler women and the organization Women in Green mobilized locally, furthering and even transforming the landscape of their larger Zionist project. They drew on *much more* than their maternal and familial subject positions, engaging in political violence, overt mourning, and public activism, constructing and claiming a space and nurturing practices that enabled an everyday politics of settler colonialism. Hindu right-wing women and the organization *Durga Vahini* carved out a prominent space for themselves in the cultural nationalist Hindutva project. They manufactured a space for pedagogy and sociability where they not only discussed politics and the power and empowerment of women but also *worked* to put them into practice, enabling a Hindu right-wing project that was led and sustained through *warrior* women with *strong* minds. Both these narratives, thus, behave crucial feminist questions – *How are right-wing*

*Judea and Samaria*. I left my country to make a new home, why should I not be in a place that is the holiest? It is here, in this community of Kiryat Arba, that people have loved my family and me the most *ever*. I never want to leave, even if I have to live away for work half the week.<sup>382</sup>

Between Dr Abraham's arduous commutes and job and taking care of the three children—Shmuel, now in his early twenties, who now lived with his parents; Sarah, almost twenty, who was in the Army when not representing Israel in kickboxing championships; and Little Flower, a teenager, who lived in an all-girls Jewish boarding school in Jerusalem—Malka decided to stop working as a nurse. She instead wanted to focus on her Hebrew and her political and cultural life in the settlement.<sup>383</sup>

"I think it is time for me to enjoy my life a little bit, you know", Malka glanced at me as she said this, looking for approval, as we strolled through the settlement.<sup>384</sup> I nodded. Malka smiled and continued,

I have been working since I was so young. Nursing is a hard life—you are on your feet all the time and everyone treats you so badly. And then I had three children and I had to raise them. I had to take care of Daak, the kids, my old parents, and my own work and on top of that, I had to make sure we followed Jewish customs and rituals and it was *all* very *very* tiring. Now that I am *here*, in *my land*, I just want to relax and enjoy—*live for my Jewish community and myself*. Learn Hebrew to perfection, cook great food, take long walks, keep fighting for our

<sup>382</sup> Conversation with Dr Abraham, Route 60, West Bank, Palestine, 30 August 2014.

<sup>383</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 28 August and 14 September 2014.

<sup>384</sup> Conversation with Malka, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 14 September 2014.



women's subjectivities produced? How do right-wing women mobilize? What practices do their mobilizations contain? How do their mobilizations enable everyday politics and transform their larger projects? How do they construct their discourses, imageries, iconographies, symbols, and material settings? How do they bargain and negotiate with(in) their larger projects, furthering their own personal-political agendas? How do processes such as neoliberalism, migration, globalization, urbanisation, racialization etc. shape their politics? How can right-wing women's everyday politics re-shape our feminist understanding of the dichotomies of victim/agent, private/public, and personal/political? Where do these two particular movements converge and diverge and why? Lastly, how can feminist scholars create knowledges about right-wing women even as their politics render us supremely angry and uncomfortable?

This thesis addresses the abovementioned questions through the use of ethnographic and narrative research conducted in 2013 and 2014 with Hindu right-wing women in India and Zionist settler women in Israel-Palestine. I argue that through a politics of the everyday, right-wing women bargain and negotiate with patriarchal communities/homes, male-formulated ideologies and discourses, and male-dominated right-wing projects and spaces. These mediations replicate and affirm *as well as* subvert and challenge patriarchal structures and power hierarchies, troubling the binaries of home/world, private/public, personal/political, and victim/agent. I assert that dominant literature on right-wing women focuses on motherhood and family, ignoring various other crucial subject positions that are constituted and occupied by right-wing women and neglecting the agential and empowering potential of right-wing women's subjectivities. I further argue that there are four key *locations* that capture the nuances of the everyday mobilizations of right-wing women. These *locations* function as the four themes/lenses of this thesis. They are: pedagogy and education; charity and humanitarian work; intimacy,

freedom from *those* Arabs, make life-long deep friendships and live a happy life.<sup>385</sup>

As we passed by the home of the Nachsons, the elderly couple who had hosted me for Sabbath recently, Malka shouted for Sarah Nachson, who appeared in the window of the first floor. They greeted each other with affection. Sarah then looked at me and after asking me how I was added – “I am so happy to see you both together again. Malka is my daughter”.<sup>386</sup> As we continued walking, Malka explained,

Our own parents are gone now and we hardly go back to India to see extended family—Daak goes back every few months to help Hindus convert to Judaism but I never do, I have not gone back since I got here. So the Nachsons are our family here; they are our parents. Sarah and Rabbi Nachson, they guide us and help us. They give us advice and love and care like parents would.<sup>387</sup>

The significant intimacy of this *adopted* family was made even clearer when *the Doctor* told me that the Nachsons had been helping him financially as he attempted to start a small business for his son, Shmuel.<sup>388</sup>

On our frequent walks through the settlement and visits to the market, café, parks, and the synagogue, the status of Malka and Dr Abraham in this community was apparent to me—they were loved and they were respected. People stopped to enquire after them and their well-being; friends told stories of their Jewish *re-wedding* at the Cave of the Patriarchs; neighbours asked *the Doctor* for medical advice; women in Kiryat Arba and in Women in Green had taken Malka under their wing, sharing spaces of religious ceremonies and

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

<sup>386</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 14 and 15 September 2014.

<sup>387</sup> Conversation with Malka, Kiryat Arba, Palestine, 14 September 2014.

<sup>388</sup> Fieldnotes, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 19 September 2014.

friendship, sociability and leisure; and political violence. By interrogating the practices that are contained in and enabled by these four *locations* of Hindu right-wing and Zionist settler women's everyday politics, this thesis highlights the multiple narratives, contradictions, pluralities, hierarchies, power structures, languages, and discourses that encompass right-wing women's projects. By capturing the processes of subject formation of right-wing women, I encapsulate how my interlocutors shape the subjectivities of those in their communities, transforming the local and international landscapes of the Hindu right-wing and the Zionist settler project. Drawing together ethnographic narratives, visuals, methodological and ethical reflections, and theoretical engagement, this thesis asks what the many-layered textures of everyday politics of right-wing women might mean for feminist scholarship, feminist methodologies, feminist ethics, and feminist activism.

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In the remaining pages of this introductory chapter, I do four things. I present a summarised genealogy of women's participation in the Hindu right-wing and Zionist settler project, briefly highlighting the reasons for choosing these two movements. I then provide a conceptualization of the term 'right-wing' and subsequently lay out an overview of the key literature on right-wing women. Finally, I specify the outline of the chapters in this thesis. As issues of methodology and ethics remain extremely significant and complicated with regards to this research project, I do not elaborate on them in the introduction. Instead, I discuss them in depth in a separate chapter.

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While conducting previous research pertaining to gender and feminist studies, I remember being asked by sceptical 'mainstream' colleagues –*why is a feminist approach necessary? What can the everyday tell you about international*

everyday activities with her; the children had found hobbies and friends. In this illegal settlement on occupied land, surrounded by barbed wire, electric fences, and IDF soldiers, the Abrahams had found the community they so longed for; they had *located* their happiness and intimacy with Malka carving the leisure time she so desired.<sup>389</sup> However, as with any other space of kinship and community, interspersed with practices of care and affection, in this intimate space, were hushed whispers, gossip, and topics that were taboo.

At some point during my time with Zionist women settlers and my visits to *the Kiryat*, I realized that I had heard several mentions of the Abrahams' children but I had only met them in brief hurried encounters. Little Flower was only home for Sabbath and was a shy teenager. Sarah was always busy – between the Army and kickboxing, her phone and friends occupied her spare time. Shmuel lived with his parents and was around; I often saw him smoking outside the building, but he never said more than a greeting to me.<sup>390</sup> As I walked with Sarah Nachson one evening, we ran into Shmuel. When he was out of earshot, Sarah whispered,

Something is not right with that boy. He is not right in the head. Stay away from him if you can.<sup>391</sup>

I had heard this sentiment expressed several times, always in hushed tones between quick glances. On a previous occasion, Sarai elaborated,

He is a *total* loser. He got kicked out of the Army for taking photographs of the Syrian border. He has a problem with authority – *all kinds of problems*. He can't keep a job; he keeps failing at whatever he

<sup>389</sup> Fieldnotes, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 19 September 2014.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

<sup>391</sup> Conversation with Sarah Nachson, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 30 August 2014.

*politics*? After embarking on this research project, the scepticisms around my work, its *necessity* and *contribution* poured in from feminists too. As mentioned earlier, dominant research on right-wing women by feminist has approached the women as a *problem* that needs to be *fixed* and as a *threat* that requires *vigilance*. Boundaries of what is deemed as *acceptable* and *progressive* research, who comprises a subject that you *can* empathize with, what/whose stories *need* telling and listening, which everyday and ordinary lives are *worthy* of study, and the forms of agency that are *emancipatory* and *empowering* are strict and enforced. Research that lies outside of these boundaries is often viewed with suspicion and disapproval.

I believe that the two quotes that open this chapter contain my response to these *tensions*. Arundhati Roy's vivid and affecting words epitomize the extraordinariness of the ordinary—the inexhaustible nooks and crannies of the everyday. John O'Donohue's poem perfectly captures the illusion of the concrete and rigid boundaries that seek to dictate feminist research. For it is not in search of a fixed floor, but precisely in the spaces and silences between this dust, in the very presence of this dust, and in the properties (seen and unseen) of this dust, that I ask my research questions, plant my research project, and locate the *bleached bones* of my interlocutors' narratives and politics.

## 1.2 Hindu Nationalist and Zionist Settler Women: A Brief Introduction

I have chosen to examine Hindu right-wing and Zionist settler women for four reasons. First, the two projects are contemporary and remain politically relevant, charged, and growing. Second, while there are numerous works that have examined Hindu nationalism and Israeli settler colonialism in depth, there remain certain silences around the politics of women in these

does; and he is so rude to his parents. They love him so much. In fact, *too much*, if you ask me.<sup>392</sup>

I was confused and looking at my face she added,

They love him much much more than Sarah. Little flower is pampered because she is the youngest child but they treat Sarah the worst. They talk as if they are so proud of her kickboxing achievements but they didn't even want her to do this. They would prefer if she became a doctor. They ignore her so much and treat her so badly—and all for that useless boy.<sup>393</sup>

Towards the end of my stay in Israel-Palestine, I visited *the Kiryat* one last time to say goodbye to my interlocutors there. It was a warm Sunday afternoon and Sarai was telling me about the snow they had had the previous winter. *The Doctor* called her on the phone and requested for us to go outside his house as a truck full of boxes was arriving for him. He was following the truck in his car, a few kilometres behind it. He wanted to ensure the boxes were offloaded in front of the correct place. We hurried over to his building. The boxes were full of shoes that had been imported from India by ship.<sup>394</sup> As Dr Abraham elaborated when he arrived,

Shmuel will sell these shoes in the market in the community. I am setting up a small business for him. He will set up a temporary stall in the market and then finally when things go well, he will open a shop. I will make sure everything goes well for him. He needs to do this.<sup>395</sup>

Malka, Dr Abraham, Sarai and I spent the next hour sitting on the parapet outside the apartment building and talking; the boxes lay *everywhere*. Shmuel

<sup>392</sup> Conversation with Sarai, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 28 August 2014.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

<sup>394</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 21 September 2014.

<sup>395</sup> Conversation with Dr Abraham and Sarai, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 21 September 2014.

movements. Third, the two projects share striking similarities and connections and even online/offline interactions. While scholars have elaborated on a breadth of topics (from foreign policy to diaspora politics) on the intersections between the two, there remains a silence on everyday women's politics in this literature (Murphy, 2001; Chiriyankandath, 2007; Prashad 2013, 2015; Anderson, 2015). Fourth, this thesis is drawn out of my own personal-political feminist struggles and interrogations. Watching the rise of the Hindu right-wing in India and the spread and rise of Israeli Zionist settler colonialism in Palestine has compelled my feminist activist and academic self to ask uncomfortable and difficult questions. Before I provide a succinct genealogy of women's involvement in these two projects, I also find it pertinent to mention that a comprehensive overall discussion on the two projects is beyond the scope of this thesis.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For a detailed examination of Hindu nationalism, see the following work - Hansen, T. (1999). *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press; Jaffrelot, C. (1998). *The Hindu Nationalist Movement In India*. New York: Columbia University Press; Bhatt, C. (2001). *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*. Oxford ; New York: Berg 3PL; Jaffrelot, C. (2009). *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press; Ghassem-Fachandi, P. (2012). *Pogrom in Gujarat: Hindu Nationalism and Anti-Muslim Violence in India*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

For a detailed examination of Israeli settler colonialism, see the following work - Shlaim, A. (2000). *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*. London: Penguin Books; Abu El-Haj, N. (2001). *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press; Khalidi, R. (2006). *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood*. Oxford: Oneworld; Pappe, I. (2006). *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. Oxford: Oneworld; Weizman, E. (2012). *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*. London & New York: Verso; Lentin, R., ed. (2008). *Thinking Palestine*. London & New York: Zed Books; Gordon, N. (2008). *Israel's Occupation*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, & London: University of California Press; Shlaim, A. (2010). *Israel and Palestine*. London & New York: Verso; Abdo, N. (2011). *Women in Israel: Race, Gender and Citizenship*. London & New York: Zed Books; Natanel, K. (2016) *Sustaining Conflict: Apathy and Domination in Israel-Palestine*. University of California Press.

walked in and out of the building several times; he neither acknowledged his father (or us) nor did he lift a finger. As I hugged *the Doctor* and Malka goodbye, I watched as they began to carry the heavy boxes into the building and up the stairs. Sarai stood by me; she rolled her eyes, muttering immense disapproval under her breath.<sup>396</sup>

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Pain and Staeheli (2014:345) suggest that intimacy consists of three intersecting sets of relations—spatial relations that extend from the private to the public and the proximate to the distant, modes of interaction and emotion that stretch from the personal to the political, and practices that connect the embodied subject to the global. Under the umbrella of this three-fold understanding of intimacy, I have begun this chapter with the winding narrative of the Abrahams as it untangles three threads of the intimate that weave this chapter (and thesis) together.

First, as I embarked on this research project aiming to *push* geographical *boundaries* and further scholarship in feminist international relations by examining women's politics in two connected but separate right-wing projects, I looked for *obvious* connections—interactions (online and offline), ideological similarities, and convergences and divergences in practice and discourse. The narratives of the Abraham family illustrated the non-linear, unexpected, and complex meandering paths that trace the relationships between women, practices, movements, politics, and regions. Furthermore, these narratives were a lesson for me not only in the surprises sprung on the researcher by methodology and the *practice* of *doing* fieldwork but also in the very epistemological reasoning of this project. They made me question the

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<sup>396</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 21 September 2014.

### Women's (In)Visibility in the Hindu Right-Wing

Between 1920 and 1930, the Hindu right-wing movement in India consolidated itself as a populist, cultural nationalist, anti-colonial, and anti-Muslim effort that aimed to preserve 'Hindu' values and protect the 'Hindu' nation—its territory and its women—from the 'other' (Hansen, 1999). In 1925, its founding organization, the RSS, *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (Nationalist Volunteers Association), was set up to provide an organizational base for the Hindu men (Jaffrelot, 1998). Eventually, a set of organizations (including women's organizations) was built around the RSS to form (what is now known as) the *Sangh Parivar* (Family of Associations).<sup>17</sup>

In the early decades of the movement (1930-1970), the partition of India and the subsequent abduction and rape of 'Hindu' women by 'Muslim' men<sup>18</sup> remained the centre of nationalist discourse (Sarkar & Butalia, 1998). During these decades, while the right-wing project's women consolidated themselves into a separate organization (*Rashtra Sevika Samiti* – National Women Volunteers Committee), they imbibed and espoused the male-formulated discourse of the movement that identified them as nurturing mothers of the nation. Hindu nationalist women, thus, functioned as symbolic victim-bodies supporting the larger discourse of the movement that was built around the victimization of the 'weak' Hindu woman by the 'lustful' Muslim male. Thus, while women remained largely (physically) invisible, their bodies were central to the discourse of the movement (Sarkar & Butalia, 1998; Menon, 2010).

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<sup>17</sup> The word *parivar* (family) is not only used to imply that all these organizations are a part of the same larger project, but is also used because the Hindu nationalist project considers the *parivar* to be the primary societal unit that is responsible for imparting good Hindu values into individuals and for maintaining the Hindu nation. For more details on the Sangh Parivar, see <http://www.sanghparivar.org/>

<sup>18</sup> Abduction and rape of women on both sides (India and Pakistan) occurred during the partition. For more on this see Butalia, U. (2000). *The Other Side of Violence: Voices from the Partition of India*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press

latent intimacies between my interlocutors in the two movements/regions and also compelled me to reflect on the *intimacy of fieldwork* and the *collection* of these stories.

Second, the narrative(s) of the Abrahams etch out the spatial practices and modes of emotion and intimacy that are involved in the unmaking and making of communities in right-wing movements. Dr Abraham was at unease with the community of his birth and surroundings. He broke societal convention and along with Malka, built intimate relationships establishing a *new community*—transient at times—in Mumbai. As this site of friendship and sociability unravelled, migration to Israel and Kiryat Arba mediated the formation of a new *community*—one that facilitated *new friendships*, new happiness, and new sites of work and leisure. The violence of this community was lost in stories of *finding* and *making* a home and *guarding* this home from those who wanted to destroy it. For Malka, this community not only brought new intimacies but also much-needed rest and calm. As she confessed to me, “*I have never felt at peace anywhere else in my life. Here, I can be*”.<sup>397</sup> As I focussed on violence as *the* lens to right-wing women's politics and even as I wrote about pedagogy and charity, I had forgotten a key feminist lesson. *Violence often used intimacy to masquerade as peace.*

Third, this thesis has been written at a time when journalists and academics around the world are pontificating on the *global rise of the right-wing*. Anger at the intensification of right-wing politics is often accompanied by dismissal that treats the right-wing subject as absurd, as abnormal, as stupid, as evil, as mentally ill, as uneducated, and as an aberration. Through these narratives I want to assert that our dismissal, pathologising, and humouring the right-

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<sup>397</sup> Conversation with Malka, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 19 September 2014.

In the mid-1980s, Hindu nationalist leaders rekindled the issue of the *Ramjanmabhoomi*<sup>19</sup>, rendering the city of Ayodhya in the state of Uttar Pradesh in Northern India and the Babri *masjid* (Mosque) as the main site of contestation between the ‘Hindu’ nation and the ‘Muslim’ nation (Hansen, 1999; Bhatt, 2001).<sup>20</sup> In the years that followed, a nationwide movement was launched to reclaim this site and to build a temple dedicated to the Hindu God, *Rama*, at the site of the Babri *masjid*. The movement, which saw the participation of men and women across the country and the Indian Diaspora, led to the violent demolition of the Babri *masjid* on December 6, 1992 (Hansen, 1999). The demolition of the *masjid* resulted in widespread communal riots in various parts of the country is considered a major win for the Hindu nationalists.

During this strong and public mobilization, large numbers of women took to the streets alongside men. At the peak of this movement, in 1991, Sadhvi Rithambara, a female ideologue of Hindutva, formed an organization known as *Durga Vahini* (The Army of Durga). The organization was created for young Hindu nationalist women to join the movement and participate as equals. The *mother* organization for Hindu nationalist women, the *Rashtra Sevika Samiti*, re-established itself with the guiding principles of service, security, and values (Sarkar & Butalia, 1998). Pamphlets of the new organization urged

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<sup>19</sup> *Ramjanmabhoomi* is the alleged birthplace of the Hindu God—*Rama*. The term literally translates to the ‘land or soil’ where *Rama* was born. The exact location of *Rama*’s birth is not stated with any specific accuracy within Hindu religious texts, but the term popularly refers to a tract of land in the city of Ayodhya in Northern India. From 1528-1992 this land was the site of the Babri Mosque, and the Hindu nationalists launched a movement in 1984 to reclaim this land and build a temple for *Rama* on it. This movement was called the *Ramjanmabhoomi* movement. The Babri Mosque was destroyed by the right-wing on December 6, 1992. In 2011, the disputed tract of land was divided between the Hindu nationalist, the Muslim authorities, and a charitable trust.

<sup>20</sup> For a history of this movement and the legal battle over the Muslim personal code that preceded it, see – Engineer, A. (1987). *The Shah Bano Controversy*. Bombay: Stosius Inc./Advent Books Division.

wing comes at the cost of dangerously neglecting the political. Support for right-wing politics (and especially right-wing women’s politics) is not a form of individualistic shortcoming but a “terrifying and troubling sociopolitical phenomenon in need of systemic and structural explanation” (Khalili, 2016). However, confronting the politics of the right-wing also meant encountering discomfort in explanation—for the right-wing was not a disfigurement but *came into being* and *was nurtured* through practices and politics of intimacy embedded in the everyday. To elaborate, my interlocutors and their communities were *ordinary* in their practices of intimacy, care, leisure and pleasure. From a quotidian perspective, their friendships, kinships, and relationships were formed, tested, and sustained. Happiness and joy was felt alongside hardship, family drama, and financial instability. Sites of leisure, pleasure, and peace were found between the personal and the political. Like any other tight-knit community, taboo topics, silenced otherwise, were heard through averted and quick glances, whispers, and the muttering of disapproving remarks, all disguised under friendly neighbourly smiles. Interrogating the political, therefore, necessitated examining these hauntingly familiar sites of intimacy.

There are two bodies of literature in gender and feminist research that are relevant to the three above-mentioned threads and examine the relationship between intimacy, politics, and violence. First, a vast body of academic and activist scholarship has, for decades, rigorously explored intimate-partner violence across geographies. Pain (2014, 2015) and Sjoberg and Gentry (2015) have built on this work to etch out a continuum of violence, where they argue that intimate and domestic violence and global terrorism are related attempts to exert political control through fear. Pain and Staeheli (2014) also draw on this work to assert the need to break the binary between the intimate and the geopolitical and understand how violence connects the two. Second, research

women to become *viranganas* and *ranchandis* (warrior women) and to train themselves in the use of weapons and martial arts (Sethi, 2002). Thousands of women participated in the demolition of the Babri mosque and in the rioting, killing, and arson that followed (Jaffrelot, 1998:396). Currently, women's organizations within Hindutva have thousands of chapters and branches all over the country and there are estimated to be about 6 million women involved in it in various capacities (ranging from ordinary members to ideologues to leaders). Women members hail mostly from middle and upper classes and castes and are often educated and literate, belonging to 'cultured' families and socio-cultural backgrounds.

Since the late 1980s, thus, women in the Hindu nationalist movement have been visible and active in public spaces across the country, becoming a formidable component and force of the project (Menon, 2010). They have organized themselves into community centres and branches and hold regular meetings and events across the country. They initiate and participate in demonstrations, rallies, protests, and political events as well as in rituals, festivals, and sociocultural events (Bacchetta, 2004; Menon, 2010). They organize charity drives and relief work and have embarked on grassroots initiatives across a variety of causes—all under the saffron Hindu right-wing umbrella. Across temporalities and spatialities, they have also formed militant forces, participating in everyday aggression and violence against the 'other' and deeming any entity that is deemed inimical to the progress of the 'Hindu' nation as this other (ibid.). Most recently, in the effort to elect Narendra Modi (NaMo) and the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) to parliamentary power, women have championed electoral campaigns in a variety of formal and informal roles. While their official political importance within the larger patriarchal movement is limited, appropriating history, mythology, iconography, and connecting those appropriations to practices, women in the Hindu nationalist

in feminist international relations and anthropology on gender and war has argued that *we* are all touched by violence and experience it intimate ways (Scarry, 1987; Jabri, 2006; Parashar, 2013; Sylvester, 2012). War and violence are best captured in the mundane and through the powerful intimacies and "emotions that constitute 'self', community, and the 'other'" (Parashar, 2014:5). This crucial body of work examines the emotive as well as embodied potential of violence as it produces gendered subjects. Situated in this literature is the work of Elina Penttinen (2013), who posits joy as a new methodology for researching international relations. Arguing that there was more to violence and war than suffering and victim-subjects, she engages with modes of intimacy that centre on joy, happiness, love, and healing to further feminist understandings of the international (Penttinen, 2013). While she does mention the case of women who find "alive-ness" and forms of "life-forming" and "fulfilment" in militant movements, her crucial work focuses more on sites of healing and joy in the shadow of trauma (ibid.:11).

By foregrounding the intimate and the emotional in the international, these two bodies of scholarship (and in particular Penttinen's work) have revolutionised the way we think about politics, violence, and the international. However, neither of them interrogates in detail the formations of intimacy among female perpetrators of violence. Thus, I ask – *while there is a certain intuitive disconcertment in speaking about joyful intimacy amongst those furthering horrific nationalist and settler colonial violence; how can feminist scholarship examine the affective spaces of intimacy that are crucial to the lives of Hindu right-wing and Zionist settler women? Where do we locate the politics of intimacy within right-wing women's politics of violence?*

In this chapter, I argue that the answer to these questions lies in examining the practices and spaces of friendship and sociability as well as leisure and

movement have transformed into a very visible and active force spanning several organizations and embracing right-wing politics in the everyday.

### **Zionist Settler 'National-Religious' Women in Israel-Palestine**

Jacoby (2005:90) asserts that national-religious settler women in Israel “do not have a history of organizing as *women*,” having mobilized as part of larger mixed-sex/gender groups. Therefore, scholars have paid very little attention to settler women’s organizing. Israel’s ultranationalist right-wing legacy dates to the pre-state period and the Revisionist Movement that was associated with Vladimir Jabotinsky (Jacoby, 2005:92). The movement advocated a maximalist state that extended to both sides of the Jordan River and was based on the biblical claim of the re-construction of a Hebrew Kingdom in *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel) after 2000 years (Sprinzak, 1991). This early right-wing project was dominantly a militaristic movement that promoted the idea of a ‘warrior’ Jew over the ‘farming’ Jew, therefore separating itself from mainstream and labour Zionism (Bernstein, 1992). Through teachings in certain *yeshivot* (religious schools) that pushed for religious settlement, the movement advocated sustained settlement in the land of Israel, the practical application of the *Torah*, a deep love for fellow Jews, and sacredness of land (Jacoby, 2005:93). Although women were part of this nationalist vision, they did not receive religious education in the *yeshivot* (and did not all attend the *michlalot* (religious school for women)), were not obliged to fight in military conflict, did not hold public roles and were primarily confined to the domain of the home and family (Henry & Taitz, 1978). However, the Six Day War of 1967 altered the political landscape of Israel-Palestine, giving *hope* of expansion to the national-religious camp, furthering the link between cultural nationalism, religion, and the state, and cementing the drive to ‘settle’ the biblical lands of *Judea* and *Samaria* (Jacoby, 2005:93-94). This drive for

pleasure of right-wing women. It is through these spaces of joyful intimacy that Hindu right-wing women and Zionist settler women build bonds of love and care, experience happiness and *peace*, and nurture their selves, communities, and larger political causes.

This chapter is divided into four sections that use ethnographic and visual material to examine different facets of intimacy in the lives of right-wing women. In *Section 5.2*, I elaborate on the practices of friendship and sociability amongst Hindu right-wing and Zionist settler women examining how they intersect with *everyday* politics. Here, I argue that friendship and socialization were key sites of intimacy and community building that enabled right-wing women’s violence and exclusionary politics and held competing discourses of my interlocutors’ politics. In *Section 5.3*, I interrogate the practices and spaces of leisure and pleasure of right-wing women. Here, I argue that right-wing women leaders specifically designed sites for leisure and pleasure to constitute the subjectivities of their members/attendees and to also participate in various leisurely practices themselves. Leisure and pleasure were not only political projects but they also enabled and were enabled by an *everyday* right-wing politics. In *Section 5.4*, I present visual work in the form of two series of images that encapsulate the *locations* and practices of joyful intimacies amongst right-wing women. The form of this section challenges the way in which we *write* feminist politics. Finally, in *Section 5.5*, I provide a brief note on the limits and boundaries of joyful intimacies and conclude this chapter.



settlement was intensified after the 1973 War and the Camp David Accords of September 1978 (where territorial concessions were proposed) (ibid.).

A series of organizations that embraced the idea of territorial maximalism were created and furthered as part of this intensification. This included the *Hatenua Lemaan Yisrael Hashlema* (Land of Israel Movement), Labour for the Whole of *Eretz Yisrael*, and *Gush Emunim* (Bloc of the Faithful) in 1967, 1973, and 1974 respectively (Jacoby, 2005:93-94). *Gush Emunim* emerged to be one of the most important national-religious settler groups, its core ideology being the reformulation of Zionism into expansionism and political action (Lustick, 1988). *Gush* ideology indicated a deep connection to all of the holy land; a connection that could not be negotiated or withdrawn (Schnall, 1979). Thus, women affiliated to the group had a necessary role in raising large families that settled this land and 'restored' its prosperity (Sprinzak, 1991). Few women (such as Daniella Weiss) also had prominent positions under the movement as activists and leaders (Schnall, 1984:63). As Jacoby (2005) and Neuman (2000) elaborate, women were key to the settlement of Hebron, the formation of *Kiryat Arba* and other illicit outpost and settlement building. My interviews with older settler women also speak to women's roles and illustrate how women stepped out of their domestic and private spaces, mobilized the maternal and familial to settle the land in the Southern West Bank.

In 1993, my interlocutor Nadia Matar, a Belgian settler in Israel-Palestine, and her mother-in-law Ruth Matar, established Women for Israel's Tomorrow as the first women-only organization on the right in Israel. Established in opposition to the 1993 Oslo Agreements, the organization aims to preserve the

## 5.2 Making Friends and Building Bonds: Social Lives of Right-Wing

### Women

Nisha Pahuja's documentary, *The World Before Her*, portrays the *worlds* of two different sets of women—Miss India contestants in a beauty pageant boot camp and Hindu right-wing women and girls in a *Durga Vahini* camp.<sup>398</sup> As the film winds down, the protagonists are seen leaving the two spaces that were the focus of the film. Ruhi Singh, the aspiring Miss India, departs from the beauty pageant boot camp alone and competition and flies to her hometown of Jaipur. Heart broken and sullen after her loss, she walks out of the airport clouded in loneliness and is met by her father. A few hundred kilometres away, in another part of the state of Maharashtra, the *Durga Vahini* camp also concludes. The young leader of the camp, Prachi Trivedi, slows down, her resolute and aggressive persona giving way to quiet contemplation. As she ponders over her future in the Hindutva movement, the young girls leave the camp amidst loud and prolonged goodbyes. Numbers are exchanged, promises to meet are made, hugs are traded, and the girls enthusiastically wave to one another as cars take them away from the camp to their homes (Mehta, 2016).

Pahuja's film came alive when I witnessed the conclusion of the Konkan region camp of *Durga Vahini* in 2014.<sup>399</sup> The participants had finished their parade through the town, marking *saffron space* and displaying the skills they had learned during the week. They came back to the camp and packed their bags, hugging each other with promises to keep in touch and meet again. When they had arrived in this space, a mere few days ago, the girls had lined up in front of Veena to register for the camp. Now, they stood waiting to hug

<sup>398</sup> The film was released in 2012. See more about the film on its website - <http://www.worldbeforeher.com/>

<sup>399</sup> (Un)fortunately I have not been privy to a Miss India beauty pageant camp!

land of *Eretz Yisrael* by committing to its security and Jewish heritage.<sup>21</sup> Wearing green to protest the green line that “gave away land to the Arabs,” the women—who then came to be known as Women in Green—have been active in Jerusalem and the Southern West Bank since 1993. The organization is the only woman’s organization under the Zionist settler umbrella and is composed of educated and elite women of middle and upper class of varying ages. In 1995, the organization assembled a group of about thirty women and ten men and set out to settle *Givat Hadagan* (Hill of Grain) in the West Bank. Soon other families joined them and the entire affair resulted in a violent clash between the Women in Green and the military and the arrests of many members (Jacoby, 2005:99). This event drew the organization into the public eye as a women-only militant force and cemented their role as the spearhead of the national-religious settlement movement.

Since the 1990s, the organization has grown considerably, calling itself a grassroots effort that organizes public protests, demonstrations, rallies, solidarity trips to settlements in *Judea* and *Samaria*, events of cultural and religious importance, and educational events like seminars and conferences. Funded by donors, the organization espouses violence as means of expansion and control and insists that women not only contribute to *Eretz Yisrael* as mothers but also as militarized beings who were frontier soldiers and pioneers in *Judea* and *Samaria*.<sup>22</sup> While women’s involvement in the national-religious movement extends beyond this group, the status of this organization as the sole women-only force, the visibility of these women and their everyday politics and violence, necessitate that they become the centre of any discussion on the politics of Zionist settler women in Israel-Palestine.

<sup>21</sup> See the official website of the organization for more - <http://www.womeningreen.org/> Also see the Facebook page of the organization - <https://www.facebook.com/Women-in-Green-Women-for-Israel-Tomorrow-153334058037339/?fref=ts>

<sup>22</sup> Field Notes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 8 August 2014.

her goodbye. Old friendships appeared strengthened and new friendships seemed hopeful. The overwhelming weight of goodbye existed alongside cheerful intimacy and the sounds of laughter.<sup>400</sup> Looking at this scene, I remembered the questions I had when the credits rolled on at the end of Pahuja’s documentary. *How did a camp organized by an exclusionary nationalist right-wing movement that was teaching young girls to perpetuate communal violence and imbibing them with hatred become a space for friendship and intimacy to flourish? How do we reconcile the politics of those loving long goodbyes with the politics of violence showcased a mere few frames/hours ago?*

Drawing on Aristotle and Derrida, Berenskoetter (2007) inserts a notion of friendship into the reading of international relations. He argues that state friendship was an “evolving relationship” and “the process of building a common world to which states become emotionally attached” (Berenskoetter, 2007:670). Friendship between states, thus, challenges realist assumptions about the international and highlights how the self is enabled, powered, and transformed through intimate relationships (ibid.). Gandhi (2006) also provides a reading of friendship in international relations, albeit through the lens of postcolonialism. In her book, *Affective Communities*, she builds on narratives of friendship between anti-colonial leaders in the colonies (like Gandhi) and anti-imperialists in the ‘West’ to dislodge “federal identities” and binaries about empire and decolonial resistance (Gandhi, 2006:81). Both these scholars offer critical and alternative readings of the international through a politics of friendship. However, they either focus on states or macro-political (and male) actors, compelling me to ask the feminist questions relevant to this thesis – *How do ordinary and everyday friendships between women*

<sup>400</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 10 May 2014.

### Approaching Two Movements and Two Sets of Interlocutors

This thesis does not box the two movements into neat paragraphs and sections that follow each other. Instead, it moves back and forth between interlocutors and narratives from the Hindu right-wing and the Zionist settler project, linking their everyday politics to the larger themes. It also does not promise to provide equal *weightage* to each project in each chapter—letting the ‘fieldwork’ and the narratives set the presence, direction, and content. As it moves across geographies, spatialities, and temporalities, this thesis compels the reader to pay attention to the convergences and divergences between women’s politics within both movements. Drawing on Mill’s *Methods* (1843), it sketches out some of these points of connection and detachment and pays attention to how these play out.<sup>23</sup> By examining everyday politics of women in both these right-wing projects, this thesis aims to push *geographical* boundaries of *Area Studies* and bring the *regional* to the *international*. In doing so, it also brings larger and broader analyses of right-wing women’s politics to deeper levels of theoretical and discursive abstraction. As Reitz (1998:625) eloquently writes,

The real power of comparative analyses arises precisely from the fact that the process of comparing “apples” and “oranges” forces the comparatist to “develop constructs like ‘fruit’”.

### **1.3 Locating the Right-Wing**

The most widespread understandings of what constitutes the Right are derived from the study of Western European right-wing projects. These projects are “reactionary,” range from conservatism to fascism, and are positioned oppositional relative to movements, parties, and governments on

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<sup>23</sup> For a graphic understanding of Mill’s *Methods*, see - Tutorial S05 - Mill’s *Methods*-  
<http://philosophy.hku.hk/think/sci/mill.php>

*strengthen nationalist and settler colonial politics? How do right-wing politics facilitate women’s friendships?*

Early anthropological studies of friendship, while focused on the quotidian, attempted to stabilize the very category of friendship as “a kind of non-institutionalized institution” that was different from other kinships and ritualized relationships (Paine, 1969:514; Eisenstadt, 1956). Theorizing all friendships as personal and voluntary, these works are incredibly Eurocentric as they functioned on ‘Western’ notions of relating (Uhl, 1991). Desai and Killick (2012:10), thus, argue that rather than dissecting the category of friendship, there was a need to *locate* friendships in “spaces, histories, and ideologies” in different places around the world with diverse lenses. There was also a need to examine how gender and sex and the relationships they organize shape friendships and how women’s (or men’s) friendships transform these categories and the private/public divide (Bell & Coleman, 1999).

In this section, I argue that critical international relations, social anthropology, and interdisciplinary gender and feminist studies do not do justice to the varied and complex dimensions and *locations* of certain friendships. Presenting ethnographic narratives of friendships of right-wing women, I argue that friendship is a key site to examine the intimate practices of the right-wing. I address my aforementioned questions and assert that friendships enable and are enabled by right-wing women’s politics. I divide this section into two main subsections that explore the friendships of Hindu right-wing women and the friendships of Zionist settler women and then offer a conclusion that brings these together.

the Left (Bacchetta & Power, 2002:24). I find these understandings problematic in three ways.

First, much like the claim that *third world* nationalisms mimic European nationalisms, a universalized Eurocentric understanding of the Right rests on the flawed assumption that politics and social organization and modalities in societies beyond Europe remain European-derived (Anderson, 2006; Chatterjee, 1993). Second, positioning of the 'Right' as oppositional to a clearly defined Left implies the presence of clear and separate Left. It also implies that with the presence of a Left, all right-wing entities identify this Left as their main opposition. Both these claims overlook the presence of the Secular, relative to which the exclusive Right often positions itself.<sup>24</sup> Third, these claims also imply that the Right and Left are rigid categories that are not fluid and never intersect and overlap (Karam, 2002). Criticisms of the abovementioned understandings thus state that the Right constitutes a broad spectrum of thought, discourse, and activism that is heterogeneous in nature and is often in internal disagreement, only to be understood in national or social contexts (Nielsen, 2004).

Problematizing the divide between the Left and Right, Laclau (2005) argues that the right-wing is a project of populism much like the left-wing. Populism, he argues, is political emphasis and a project that constitutes a discourse of symbolic distinction between 'us' and 'them' through relational empty signifiers that take on varied content and are dependent on social and political contexts (Laclau, 2005). Through processes of identification and articulation, these categories gain meaning, and form collective identities that

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<sup>24</sup> For example, in the context of India, the majoritarian Right positions itself in opposition to not only the Left but also the Secular that is seen as inclusive of and 'partial' to minorities and is constructed as an 'anti-national' entity.

### **The Friendships of Hindu Right-Wing Women**

When I first meet my interlocutor Veena, I was surprised to see how young she was. We had spoken on the phone quite a few times and I was aware that she was a senior organiser, mentor, and teacher at the massive biannual camp of the *Durga Vahini* in the Konkan region. Veena and her *colleagues* supervised the entire camp—planning the minutiae of pedagogical activities, regulating the colossal logistical aspects of the initiative, running the weeklong activities and events, and dealing with almost two hundred participants and teachers. So as I walked down the stairs of the Thane local train station, skilfully avoiding the puddles on a day with heavy rain, I couldn't hide my astonishment when Veena approached me and introduced herself. She couldn't have been older than twenty-five and was friendly with a youthful energy to her. I wondered how someone so young could run such a big and complicated initiative. Veena and I walked around the busy streets of Thane around the train station, looking for a quiet place for a conversation. There were no cafés in the area and the teashops were occupied by groups of men. As I desperately searched for the rare park or bench in this urban sprawl, Veena pointed to a temple. It was a tiny and generic temple, local and common to almost every other street in urban India; I could see a few idols, a small space for worship, and a seller of fresh flowers outside. I thought that this temple had some significance to her work within Hindutva and I was ready to whip out my notebook and pen. It took me a few seconds to notice the nondescript bench outside the temple; enough to seat three people, hidden away behind parked cars. We had found the spot for our meetings and conversations.<sup>401</sup> Over the next few weeks, Veena and I met at Thane station regularly; we made our way to this bench where we sat and talked

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<sup>401</sup> Fieldnotes, Thane, India, 9 November 2013.

struggle over hegemony and power. Laclau (2005) and Filc (2010) assert that the distinguishing feature of the right-wing populism is that it condenses an obscure discontent and the experience of any injustice into ethnic, cultural, religious, and racial terms. Right-wing populism, thus, they argue, seeks to reinforce the dominant class over the dominated class by using tools such as demonizing, scape-goating, apocalypticism, and conspiracies to reframe ethnic/cultural/religious/racial prejudices around political issues (such as immigration, land control, reform, healthcare etc.) (ibid.). As Panizza (2005:3) argues, right-wing antagonism is

A mode of identification in which the relation between its form (the people as signifier) and its content (the people as signified) is given by the very process of naming—that is, of establishing who the enemies of the people (and therefore the people itself) are.

Drawing on Laclau (2005), this thesis conceptualizes the right-wing as a project of populism that mobilizes around cultural, religious, racial, and ethnic markers and signifiers. I understand that settler-colonialism might not be considered a populist project. However, I want to highlight that my Zionist settler women interlocutors did not view themselves as settler-colonial elite subjects; they constructed, mobilised, and articulated themselves as right-wing women and national-religious political actors mobilizing in the *ordinary* and *everyday* around the very signifiers that Laclau elaborates on. I thus hold on to Laclau's theorizations and also argue that the right-wing is conceptualized by two distinguishing factors. First, a project on the right seeks to preserve 'traditions' that it deems endangered.<sup>25</sup> Second, right-wing projects all rely on some of form of internal or external 'other'. They

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<sup>25</sup> Traditions here are defined as invented, fluid, and dynamic entities that can be contested and challenged (Hobsbawm, 1983). They take on a variety of meanings within different movements, at various times within a movement, and in the context of this thesis—within men and women's factions of the same movement.

extensively about her life, her work in the Hindu right-wing, and her friends. We also talked, not so extensively, about my life and friends.<sup>402</sup>

Veena had been a member of the *Durga Vahini* since she was a teenage girl and was very proud to have attended *every single* camp and event of the organisation in and near her town. She had grown up in a small town in the interior of the state of Maharashtra, hundreds of kilometres from Mumbai and Thane, cities she described as "big, alienating, and quite unsafe".<sup>403</sup> She was unmarried and had moved to Thane a little more than a year before to begin a job as a clerk in the Thane district court. She elaborated,

It was *so much* hard work for me to get this job. Hard work on *so many* levels. First, I had to get really *really* good marks in my college exams and that took so much work. Then I had to make the application for this job and it was so complicated. Once I made the application, there were two long tests and one very long interview. I had to travel all the way to Mumbai and Thane for the tests and interviews. And then after that, I had to wait for months before they told me if I actually passed the tests and interview. Once I cleared the tests and the interview, only then they started processing my papers and it took many months to get that official part done. *Finally*, everything was done! I could leave—I had to find a women's hostel near the court and then I moved in there and set-up things. Now, after more than a year, I feel settled here.<sup>404</sup>

Veena was very proud of attaining this job and paid a lot of attention to her work. She repeatedly mentioned to me that although she *did* want to get married and have children, she also wanted to have a successful and fulfilling career. Her defensive and emotional tone on the subject hinted to me that not

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<sup>402</sup> Fieldnotes, Thane, India, 20 November 2013.

<sup>403</sup> Conversation with Veena, Thane, India, 10 November 2013.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

appropriate, construct, produce, and mobilize the ‘other’ and construct the ‘self’ relational to the ‘difference’ with this ‘other’. These differences are based in gender, class, caste, religion, sexuality, ethnicity, community, and/or at the intersection of all these. Right-wing doctrines and practices against and regarding the ‘other’ take multiple forms (from co-existence to extermination) and are ‘explained’ by diverse discursive justifications (from cultural incompatibility to inferiorization) (Bacchetta & Power, 2002).

Given my conceptualization, the Right then encompasses movements that are (referred to as) cultural/religious/ethnic nationalist, fascist, revivalist, religious settler colonial, religious fundamentalist, fundamentalist, extremist, communally divisive and communitarian.<sup>26</sup> The dominant literature on the two movements that are the focus of my research—the Hindu right-wing project and the Zionist settler project—refers to these projects as the cultural nationalist right, the settler colonial right, the ‘national religious’ right, and the far-right.<sup>27</sup> The interlocutors in this project also use these terms and/or a combination of them to refer to themselves. This thesis, therefore, deploys the term right-wing to refer to both these political projects. I understand that it can be argued that referring to my interlocutors’ organizations, actions, and political projects with the blanket term *right-wing* simplifies their political subjectivities. However, I insist that this *umbrella* term actually makes room to navigate the multiplicities of their narratives, subject positions, and the nuances of their everyday politics.

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<sup>26</sup> The Right is also often explained by different variations of the word Right, for example: the Christian Right, the Hindu Right, the Reactionary Right, the Far Right, the Ultra Right, the Hard Right, the Religious Right—the meaning of all these being dependent on the context and the region.

<sup>27</sup> A category used in Israel to identify non-orthodox religious Zionism.

only had she fought through bureaucratic hurdles to get to this position, but also that she had faced numerous personal challenges in making the decision to move and work near Mumbai.<sup>405</sup>

I noticed her discomfort but was also aware of the boundaries of our researcher-researched relationship; I hesitated to push her on the subject of her family and their possible disapproval of her life choices. Instead, we spoke in depth about her current involvement in the Hindu right-wing. She had joined the local Thane chapter of *Durga Vahini* before she arrived there. She was active in Mumbai and Thane, organising meetings and the camp, and also attending every single event that others organised. She felt she was much more *useful* to the movement from these cities than her small town.<sup>406</sup> One morning, as we spoke of her commitment to violence and physical training in the camp, she asked me if I’d like to meet some of her friends from the Thane chapter of the organisation. I was excited and we left *our* bench to make our way to the home of one of her friends.<sup>407</sup> As we sat in the auto-rickshaw for the quick ride, she elaborated,

You know these people you will meet are not just friends. These people are my family. I love them. They are my home away from home. I have known these girls since I was young; we used to meet every year in the regional camp. We used to come to this camp every year from all over and have so much fun and then go our own way. Now I am here, alone, without a husband or brother or a father to look after me. And honestly, the only reason I can even be here and have this job and life is because of them—these friends.<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>405</sup> Fieldnotes, Thane, India, November 12, 2013.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

<sup>407</sup> Conversation with Veena, Thane, India, 18 November 2013.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.



#### 1.4 Everyday Politics and Subjectivities of Right-Wing Women: An

##### Overview

The current literature on right-wing women's politics extends into several disciplines—anthropology, politics, international relations, history, geography, sociology, literature, and gender, feminist, and women's studies. In this section, I highlight the key themes that have been explored in these bodies of literature and the questions they necessitate. These themes include—the overarching) motherhood and family, death and grieving, sexuality and chastity, and violence and non-violence.

##### Motherhood and Family

The instrumentalization of the maternal and the familial by right-wing movements has been explored in considerable detail in the interdisciplinary literature on right-wing women, especially in works on the cultural/religious/ethnic nationalist right. Early feminist interventions examined the gendered nature of imagined cultural and political entities like nations and nationalism (Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Jayawardena, 1986; Kandiyoti, 1991; Pateman, 1988). Scholars elaborated on women's constructions as the symbolic bearers of national identity and honour (individually and collectively) (ibid.). Explicitly theorizing on right-wing projects, scholars have identified that the right-wing is built on exclusionary discourses around the 'self' and the 'other', with the self forming an essentialised ethnicity/nation/religion/culture that is identified as a feminine "Mother Race" that produces and contains individual subjects are identified by their "masculinity" (Hansen, 1999). In the male-formulated foundational ideologies and discourses of several right-wing projects, the feminine exists as the "bed-rock upon which inter-masculine ethnic/cultural solidarity rests" (Bacchetta, 2004:103). Discursively, the feminine is thus equated to a motherly entity whose subjectivity is intimately and solely linked

Using her honest revelation as a bridge, I asked her if her family knew this *new family* of hers. She looked surprised and blurted out,

Of course they do! Don't your parents know your friends? Don't they know whom you are living with in London and who takes care of you?

Would they just allow anyone to enter your life?<sup>409</sup>

I felt a tad silly and did not quite have an answer to her questions. Luckily, she continued,

To be honest with you – my parents did not want me to take this job. They have heard horrible stories from the news and from relatives about big cities like Bombay and what happens there. The things that go on there are scary. They were *very* worried that something bad would happen to my reputation and me. I am single, you know. They haven't found a match for me yet and they were very worried that no man will want to marry me if he knew I was living all alone in a big city. Girls in big cities—they smoke, they drink, they have boyfriends, and they do all kinds of things. So they begged and pleaded with me to not take this job. They tried to use force and emotional blackmail and everything. I can't tell you what I went through. But I *really* wanted to work here; it is a great opportunity for me. I am a good girl with good morals and I just wanted to work. I am not going to do anything wrong or anything that will harm my character and my family's name. Only when my parents saw that I had friends from *Durga Vahini* here, they felt better. They spoke to them and they felt a bit more assured that I would be okay. The women from the organization—my friends—they are like me; they are all from good families and they have good values, they are family-type girls—they don't run around with boys. So it is only because of the movement actually that I am here—these friends

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<sup>409</sup> Conversation with Veena, Thane, India, 18 November 2013.

to the nurture of brave masculine sons. It has therefore been argued that the theme of childbirth and motherhood has been held analogous to battle in right-wing ideology (Rupp, 1997; Macciocchi, 1979).

In several right-wing projects, there has been a creation of an idealized mother figure that venerates the biological role of women. This mother figure can take the form of an overarching mother of the people or the nation or of a Mother Goddess that appropriates mythological elements (Macciocchi, 1979). For example, the German mother or the mother of the *Volk* is argued to be an attempt to create a cult around the maternal that promoted motherhood (and wifehood) as the means of transmission of racial and cultural purity. The *Volk mother*, it has been argued, is directly implicated in constructing an institutional (gendered) order which sees the nation (as imagined by the right-wing) being identified with the mother, the mother being equated to the family, and the resulting state being an amassed heap of separate families (Macciocchi, 1979; Galluci, 2002; McClintock, 1995; Sarkar, 1999). This spatiality of the idealized mother and of motherhood is also rendered a site for transformation, (re)configuration, and negotiations; all of which render it an embodied location full of contradictions and multiple subjectivities (Menon, 2010; Bacchetta, 2002).

The link between the maternal and familial, land/territory, and policy has also been theorized, holding particular importance in the context of settler-colonial right-wing projects. Motherhood in right-wing movements, it has been argued, is directly deployed to *domesticate* territory, claim land, and further political and policy issues, blurring the boundaries between the personal and the political (Galluci, 2002; Neuman, 2000). The maternal can directly affect the right-wing expansion in a community by prolific reproduction aimed to change the demographics and to address demographic fears linked to the

and *Durga Vahini* keep me going and my parents feel that I am safe and living properly with honour.<sup>410</sup>

As Veena finished this emotional monologue, opening up new conversations for *us*, we had arrived at the building where her friend, Amrita, lived. Two of her other friends, Pooja and Priya, were waiting for us downstairs. We all went up to Amrita's small apartment. As we removed our shoes and entered the living room, Veena introduced me to everyone. In addition to Amrita (and Pooja and Priya), Amrita's mother and her elder brother were present in the room. They greeted me warmly and offered me a seat on the couch. I noticed the living room was tiny but half-occupied by a *gharmandir* (home-temple) with idols, fresh flowers, and lit lamps. As my interlocutors talked to each other, Amrita's sister-in-law and her younger brother also emerged from other rooms. In a matter of minutes I had *found* myself amidst a group of people who knew each other intimately. Veena's familiarity with this group was obvious as she greeted them with casual affection—embracing all the women and greeting the men with folded hands. She asked Amrita's mother intimate questions about her illness and health and followed Amrita and her sister-in-law into the kitchen. Pooja and Priya also embodied the same comfort and ease. The young women gossiped and giggled in the kitchen, preparing tea and snacks for all of us; Amrita's mother and brothers spoke to me with affection asking me questions about my life and work. I listened to their stories about Hindutva, about Thane, about work and life; I kept an ear open for the chatter coming out of the kitchen; and I realised that in this intimate assembly of friends, I was the *only* outsider.<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> Conversation with Veena, Thane, India, 18 November 2013.

<sup>411</sup> Fieldnotes, Thane, India, 18 November 2013.



population of the 'other' (Rupp, 1997).<sup>28</sup> Motherhood, the family, children, and the domestic can be/are also strategically used in the domestication and take-over of disputed space and land (Neuman, 2000). The maternal and the familial are also often mobilized by the right to effect policy changes (for instance, policies related to morality, pornography, education, censorship, housing, healthcare, and even conflict and violence) as motherhood is assumed to have universally good intentions and the maternal and the familial are placed on a superior moral plane (Basu, 1998; Rupp, 1997; Neuman, 2000).

Finally, there is a small body of literature that looks at the performative context of motherhood in right-wing women's movements. Drawing on Butler (2006a), scholars argue that motherhood is performed and iterated in specific ways and right-wing women instrumentalize these performances, crafting and promoting them to fashion themselves and their communities (Menon, 2010; Bacchetta, 2002; Neuman, 2000). This maternal performance is crucial to the construction of 'WomenAndChildren' as this block entity that are always in need of protection.<sup>29</sup> It plays on the aforementioned assumed universal moral concern for the well-being of the child and the family and situating that well-being in direct opposition to the violence by the 'other'. Violence that not only terrorizes the life of 'WomenAndChildren' but also threatens to destroy domestic and familial order.

While these arguments on motherhood and family are diverse and detailed, they are limited in two ways. First, these arguments often offer *all-encompassing explanations* for women's participation in the right-wing, i.e.

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<sup>28</sup> In both the Hindu right-wing and the Zionist settler project, these fears are abundant and are used to push for higher birth rates.

<sup>29</sup> Feminist International Relations scholars, such as MacKenzie (2012) have also elaborated on this.

In this subsection, I'd like to draw on the narratives of Veena and her friends (and similar stories) to put forth five points on the friendships of Hindu right-wing women.

First, the friendships of my interlocutors shed light on kinships, relationships, and identities in the social lives of Hindu right-wing women and their families, reasserting the need for researching intimacy from a 'non-Western' lens (Desai & Killick, 2012). In these modes of interaction, women saw "others as extensions of themselves and themselves as extensions of others", valuing connective relationships as not only functional but also necessary for social existence (Joseph, 1993:452). The self was formed and sustained through structural relations "in which persons invite, require, and initiate involvement with others" to fashion themselves (Joseph, 1993:453). On the one hand, as the narrative of Veena suggests, this connectivity existed in conjunction with patriarchy—where subjects were organized through gendered and aged domination with a strict focus on morality (of women) and exertion of control (over women) by the male and older members of these relational formations. To borrow Suad Joseph's (1993) term here – 'patriarchal connectivity' enabled Veena's parents' fear and displeasure at her relocation to *the big city*. It also reassured them that Veena was safe as she had *respectable* friends like Amrita whose mother and brothers were *watching over* their daughter. On the other hand, Hindu right-wing women's friendships also suggest that the connectivity was a means of bargaining with patriarchy—where young women like Veena, Amrita, Pooja, and Priya used their relationship with each other to gain mobility and access to lives that they were previously denied (Kandiyoti, 1988). They travelled together; they participated in political events together; they went on vacations and Hindutva *work-trips* together; and they made *everyday* memories of happiness and joy together. As long as they were together, they were deemed *safe* and *decent*. Friendship, thus, was not only a

women are in these movements because their motherhood (and wifehood) are important to the movements' sustenance and growth. In doing so, these theorizations ignore how right-wing women's agency and mobilization extends beyond the realm of the maternal and familial. Second, even as theorizations that limit themselves to one arena of exploration, i.e. the maternal and familial arena, these arguments do not sufficiently explore the role of the maternal and the familial in the complex formation of the right-wing woman subject.

To elaborate, while scholars have theorized maternal performance, what do we make of the performativity of motherhood by child-less and family-less Hindu right-wing women? While there has been research on the links between land, policy, and the maternal/familial, why has it been limited to how women mobilise for the *larger* causes and goals of the right-wing? Can the maternal and familial not also be mobilised for right-wing women for their own causes and agendas within a movement to bargain with the dominant and hegemonic ends of a right-wing project? For example, while prolific reproduction is seen by scholars as a demand upon right-wing women to further the larger demographic goals of a particular project, right-wing women (including my interlocutors) often insist on prolific reproduction not as means to achieve larger goals of their movements but as means of resisting and subverting ideas around 'Western' feminism, 'Western' models of female empowerment, Malthusian conceptualizations of rationality, and capitalism and consumerism that is seen as promoting material greed by encouraging small families. Thus, looking at these silences, I ask – *is the maternal and the familial, as used by right-wing women, a mere extension of everyday domesticity and the private or is it used in an agential attempt of fashioning and re-fashioning the self and struggling for power and authority?*

relationship through which the lives of my interlocutors were policed, but was also a mode of interaction through which they were constituted as agential subjects pushing the boundaries of permissibility.

Second, friendship emerges as a crucial site that brings together two threads of the Hindu right-wing—the conservative *traditional* and the neoliberal. To elaborate, the Hindu right-wing project sees itself as the guardian of the basic unit of the nation—the Hindu family (Hansen, 1999; Sarkar & Butalia, 1998). Through socio-spatial practices and regular events it facilitates the coming together of families and friends, allowing for the formation of a *large Hindu community* and a network of friendships (Bacchetta, 2002, 2004). Members of these formations look out for each other, offering protection, support, and care. They also enforce gendered norms of morality and respectability through the policing of this community, vowing to uphold the *traditional* values of the project in the face of *modernity* and its temptations. Simultaneously, the Hindu right-wing propels itself as a neoliberal project—relying on tropes and promises of economic growth, development, middle class aspirations, globalization, education, entrepreneurship, and the technological modern (Hussein & Hussain, 2016; Mehta, 2016; Desai & Roy, 2016; Jaffrelot, 2016). While the discourse of tradition seeks to control the role and bodies of women, the neoliberal governmentality of self-reliance disguises these means of domination by offering to *empower* women, encouraging them to work (in *respected* professions) and embrace careers (albeit not at the expense of family). Thousands of young women in the movement, like Veena, are pushing the boundaries between *the home* and *the world*, and pursuing higher education and jobs. The *new Indian woman*—endorsed by nationalism, delivered into your living room through television

### Death and (Maternal) Grieving

There is a small set of interdisciplinary work that examines the theme of death and grieving in the context of right-wing women. Scholars have argued that although the primary role of women in the right-wing has been to be reproducing and nurturing mothers, right-wing women play an important *secondary* role that allows the right-wing to construct the 'other' as evil, inadequate, and incompatible. This role is that of bodies that grieve widespread death and loss, of widowhood and displays of maternal grief (Bacchetta & Power, 2002).

The (sparse) scholarship on this subject can be divided into two categories. First, there are works that look how the larger (male-dominated) right-wing instrumentalizes the feminine and the maternal in the sorrow and grief of baneful widows and mothers who've lost their children. Grief and loss, here, are used to gain more members and a larger following, inculcate a widespread sense of empathy across current members and supporters, and further demonize the 'other' as one that takes away precious life and leaves behind sorrowful women. These works argue that right-wing women in the contexts of death and grief appear as passive victims who are 'performing' a range of emotions (from stoicism to overly displayed forms of grief and mourning) on demand for the larger male cause of necro-nationalism (Maccocchi, 1979:68; Rupp, 1997).

Second, there is scholarship that pushes against and challenges the passiveness of women (and their *on-demand* performance of loss) that is elaborated on in the first category of works. Scholars, here, argue that right-wing projects flourish in a backdrop of existing and plentiful national and settler colonial narratives of motherhood, sacrificial death, and martyrdom to protect the values of the 'self' from the 'other' (Neuman, 2000). Death and

and advertisements,<sup>412</sup> and brought into *being* with assistance from Hindu right-wing women's pedagogical events—emerges as a mobile and independent subject who is empowered yet traditional and modern yet moral. Familial patriarchs in the Hindu right-wing express that they want "their daughters to have the same possibilities as their sons" while reminding daughters (like Veena) that "women will always have additional responsibilities in the home and the burden of honour and shame of the entire family".<sup>413</sup>

One of the ways through which these two worlds of *tradition* and neoliberalism (both of which rely on patriarchal control) intersect and reconcile is through formations of affective networks and friendships within women's Hindu right-wing organisations. Women are encouraged to leave their homes and pursue *their dreams* under the watchful eyes of suitable friends and their families. Network of friends from the Hindu right-wing are relied upon to provide assistance, emotional support, and guidance as women migrate for work and education. Friendships become the means to survive and flourish and also sites of bonding, care, affection, and joy. They also provide meaning to the multiple logics of Hindu nationalism.

To assertively conclude this point, I'd like to highlight the narrative of my twenty-nine year old interlocutor Malini. Malini hailed from a small town in the state of Uttar Pradesh and had moved to Delhi in 2011 to study for a postgraduate degree in business. Her family has been involved in various Hindu right-wing organisations in their town for decades. After finishing her degree, she found a job in the city and even as her parents hesitated, she

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<sup>412</sup> For example, see the following advertisement for Titan Watches (that coined the hashtag #HerLifeHerChoices) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXRobQjVI9s>

<sup>413</sup> Conversation with Shyam Mehra, New Delhi, India, 20 February 2014.

maternal grief thus become powerful and standardized tropes that not only appeal to ‘universal’ concerns and fears around violent death, but can also be instrumentalized, enacted, and performed by the women themselves to further their own goals, agendas, and positions in the movement. These scholars, thus, urge and allow us to question the very categories of ‘passive victims’ and the very idea of instrumentalization (Rupp, 1997; Bacchetta, 2002).

Although it does not elaborate on this, this second body of literature on right-wing women, death, and grieving, I argue, also questions the dichotomies of victimhood/agency and passive/active. While grieving right-wing mothers and widows embody an aura of victimization and loss, the appropriation of this grief in multiple (and often provocative) ways challenges this narrative of victimhood, highlighting political agency in the constitution of their subjectivities. This thesis will delve into these appropriations of grief and illustrate how they become pedagogical content and question dichotomies and dualities. Furthermore, I assert that while scholarship on right-wing women, death, and grieving details the themes of the maternal and the familial, it does not move beyond these themes. So I ask – *what do we make of women who construct themselves as militarized selves and bodies that are willing to fight and die for the nation? How do we analyse the role of death in the fashioning of their subjecthood? What do we make of the danger of death (and injury) that right-wing women routinely put themselves in, willingly, as part of their activities? How does the death and grief of the ‘other’ enter the discourses and politics of right-wing women?*

### **Sexuality and Chastity**

The bodies of literature that examine the theme of sexuality of right-wing women are also sparse and embedded with silences. Discussions on the

decided to take up the position. When I met her in 2014, she was also actively involved in campaigning for BJP and Modi. I asked Malini to elaborate on why she made the decision to work in Delhi and how she convinced her parents to allow her to do so.<sup>414</sup> She spoke to me for a long time:

When I first came here as a student, it was much easier—my parents thought I’ll study for two years and get married. There was a girl’s hostel in the college so I could stay there. It was simple. My father and brother came to drop me and as soon as we got here, we went to see my mother’s friends who are all part of the *Samiti*. My father told them I was their responsibility now; he told me he trusted them to take care of me and that I should make sure I don’t disappoint him. He said he didn’t ever want to regret letting me go for higher studies. When I finished studying, my mother wanted me to come back and get married quickly but I got this job. They were very worried about it—after all—where will I live? Who will I live with? And I am almost thirty and unmarried. There was a lot of drama—I tell you—so much crying. I wanted to stay; my mother threatened to kill herself. *So much* emotional blackmail. So we came to a compromise. I would work for two years and while I worked I would live with my friends from *Durga Vahini*—my mother knows their family. We found an apartment together and everyone is very decent and no boys are allowed. Some of the older ladies I know in the *Samiti* are looking for matches for my marriage. I know I have to go back in two years to my family, but to tell you the truth, I am having so much fun in Delhi living with my friends—we watch movies, we cook, we go shopping. I am actually hoping that someone will find a match for me in this city only—then I

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<sup>414</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 20 February 2014.

sexuality of right-wing women revolve around two major ideas, the *protection* of this sexuality from the ‘other’ and an imagination of sexuality that is compatible with the familial and the maternal.

To elaborate on the first, it has been widely argued that since women of a community symbolize its honour and lineage, the violation of their bodies is not only dishonourable for the entire community but is akin to the violation and corruption of the land/territory/nation (Hansen, 1999; Yuval-Davis & Anthias 1989; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Jayawardena, 1986; Kandiyoti, 1991; Pateman, 1988). I stand in complete agreement with this decades-long argument. However, I also insist that this argument ushers in a curiosity regarding the juxtaposition of the de-sexualized (or asexual) chaste right-wing woman and her sexuality, a curiosity that is left within the silences of this literature. While right-wing women’s sexuality is crucial to protectionist discourses in these movements, the women themselves are constructed as chaste, asexual, non-sexual, and desexualized beings. *Therefore, does the right-wing construct and instrumentalize on the sexuality of its women or the very absence of sexuality of its women?*

To elaborate on the second, it has been argued that right-wing women’s discourses emphasize on the importance of maintaining strict gender roles and the key way in which these gender roles are enforced has been the control of women’s bodies and their sexualities. The sex-segregated nature of most right-wing projects, the emphasis on the heteronormative family unit, the moral vigilance of the community as an important practice within the right-wing, the emphasis on prolific reproduction, all equate sexuality solely to motherhood (Deutsch, 2002; Enders, 2002). Scholars who have elaborated on this equation of sexuality with motherhood have also highlighted the “patriarchal bargains” related to sexuality and family that right-wing women

can continue seeing these friends *and* work *and* my parents will also be happy because I’ll be married.<sup>415</sup>

Third, while friendships enable certain subjectivities, I argue that the socio-spatial practices of the Hindu right-wing in turn enable friendships. To elaborate, women meet at the weekly *shakhas* (branches) and through community events (ranging from yoga to pedagogical sessions). They make their way to political events and protests together. They even travel outside of their cities to annual camps and conferences. The regularity of these events, their intimate organisation in cosy spatialities as well as their content which incorporates *fun* activities such as singing, games, performances, and storytelling alongside personal and affectionate sharing—all facilitate the formation of close friendships and affective bonds. Furthermore, as these events are sex-segregated and women-only, my interlocutors can access them without opposition from the patriarchs in their families.

Fourth, while friendships form and strengthen through Hindu right-wing women’s organisations, they also, occasionally, allow for the growth of the *Samiti* and *Durga Vahini* in numbers and support. To elaborate, Veena’s friend Amrita mentioned to me that she had introduced two of her college friends to the Hindu right-wing. She took them along to a pedagogical event where they met Veena, Pooja, and Priya (among others).<sup>416</sup> As she said, “*they had so much fun and everyone really got along – so they kept coming back with me*”.<sup>417</sup> My interlocutors met other women during their daily lives (usually at work, university, or in the women’s hostels they often stayed at) and often introduced these women to their work in Hindu right-wing organisations. They *dragged* their *other* friends into events and weekly meetings, enticing

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<sup>415</sup> Interview with Malini, New Delhi, India, 20 February 2014.

<sup>416</sup> Fieldnotes, Thane, India, 18 November 2013.

<sup>417</sup> Conversation with Amrita, Thane, India, 18 November 2013.

often negotiate (Kandiyoti, 1988). For example, movements such as the Hindu right-wing only recruit women in senior leadership roles and political positions if they publicly embrace celibacy (either as widows or as family-less women dedicated to serving the nation). Women who decide to take on these powerful roles, thus, can only do so under certain (patriarchal) conditions that relate to the control of their sexualities and are deeply grounded in language of family, marriage, and motherhood (Banerjee, 2005; Sarkar & Butalia, 1998).<sup>30</sup>

The abovementioned ideas around sexuality and chastity both remain silent on how the control of sexuality can be rendered as a site for activism for right-wing women. To elaborate, right-wing women's activism and political mobilization often revolves around issues linked to sex and sexuality. Pornography, abortion, obscenity, homosexuality, vulgarity etc. being a few examples of these. Thus, sexuality and chastity, sites of 'oppressive' patriarchal control of right-wing women subjects also transform into spaces of political activism. *How does this complicate the subjectivities of right-wing women?*

Recently, two miniscule bodies of literature that also discuss sexuality of right-wing women have emerged in masculinity studies and queer theory. The first body of literature argues that not only do women in powerful positions in the right-wing desexualize themselves, but they also simultaneously masculinize themselves and construct themselves as 'warrior women' capable of 'manly' politics (Banerjee, 2005). The second body of literature *queers* the right-wing, arguing that the aforementioned masculinization of right-wing women (in terms of the language they use and

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<sup>30</sup> The idea of the celibate leader (male or female) is grounded in the justification that a person (especially a woman) can only either serve the society and nation or her family. Doing both was unfair to the nation and her family. It is also interesting to note that sexuality here is only referred to in the marital context. Being unmarried and childless is equated to being celibate.

them with the *fun* activities and subsequently incorporated them into the affective networks of these organisations. Many of these *new* women then became regulars at the *shakhas* (branches) and even active members of the *Samiti* and *Durga Vahini*.<sup>418</sup> Here, friendship became a mode of increasing the reach of Hindu right-wing women's organizing and shaping the subjectivities of those who were hitherto not affiliated with the project.

Fifth and final, I argue that the gendered specificity of female friendships facilitated Hindu right-wing women's mobility and access to the political. I have already mentioned how the women-only nature of the *Samiti* and *Durga Vahini's* events enables wider participation by women; I'd like to elaborate on this by presenting an exchange I had with a male interlocutor from the Hindu right-wing.

In March 2014, I attended the first annual meeting of the nascent Hindu Defence League (HDL). The organization's leadership team consisted of about twenty-five young, middle class, and educated men from across India who had met each other on social media. Gathered in a beautiful bungalow in Northwest Delhi, they penned their manifesto, conducting meetings interspersed with lectures from senior male members, protests, BJP election campaigning, disjointed discussions, informal conversations, and food and cigarette breaks.<sup>419</sup> I was the only woman present in this space, although, Hindu right-wing women and the possibility of a *woman's cell* within HDL were mentioned often. I asked Varun, a twenty-eight year old from Bangalore, why women were missing in this space even as they outnumbered men on Hindu right-wing's social media spaces. He smiled and muttered sheepishly,

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<sup>418</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 20 November 2013 and 20 April 2014.

<sup>419</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 1 March 2014.

the performance/spectacle they embody) show recurrent evocation of “queer bodies of rage, lust, defecation, and secretion used to stimulate and enrage predominantly male audience in their call to arms” (Ghosh, 2002:261). Thus the de-sexualized celibate (disciplined, domesticated, normative) feminine body is then rendered a queered feminine body of excesses and pleasure (Foucault, 1990). I am in agreement with both these nascent bodies of literature and elaborate on their arguments in subsequent chapters; this *new* literature, I assert complicates the formation of right-wing women subjects and their politics. However, I also ask – *how do women’s negotiations of femininities and masculinities re-configure men, their ideas of masculinity, and gender relations in the home and in the politics of right-wing projects? How do right-wing women use a queer language and performance to justify their politics and violence?*

### **Violence and Non-Violence**

Discourses perpetuated and constructed by right-wing women centre around the evil ‘other’ are often grounded in a language of violence and aggression (Sen, 2008). My interlocutors also render violence and aggression as forms of political mobilization. However, early studies on women and violence assumed that women are inherently more passive than men (Sharoni, 1995; Reardon, 1999; Ruddick, 1998). Two problematic arguments based on conceptions of womanhood have been used to create this early dichotomy between “women’s peace” and “men’s violence” (York, 1998:19). First, women are mothers and nurturers and are hence considered *biologically* and innately opposed to violence. Secondly, cooperation and care are constructed as feminine traits, while dominance and violence are seen as masculine traits. Scholars have used this biological determinism to assert that violence was inherently masculine and that women who were violent could be ‘explained’

The thing is Hindutva women are okay with talking to us, guys, online and working with us on the BJP campaign either on the Internet or in very formal events. But they don’t want to give us their private details for a meeting like this—they don’t want to give us their phone numbers and addresses—they don’t want to be *visible* with men around and they definitely don’t want to come to a house full of men. It is not good for their reputation. Also, you know the bigger problem is that guys and erm, us men, we sometimes stalk them—*not me or anyone here* but there have been men who do such things—so women only feel safe with other women in Hindutva. That is their scene. They are very active, but they feel safer in women-only spaces. Also to be honest, their bonds are stronger—they are emotional, they like shopping, they talk very personal things. Here, us guys, we fight and we swear at each other. Women are not like that; they are even closer, they see each other more. It is just different.<sup>420</sup>

While Varun’s *explanation* relied on essentialising women’s friendships and making excuses for male harassment, it revealed something crucial. Women’s friendships and their female-only organization nurtured deeper and frank closeness among my interlocutors, majority of whom had grown up in sex-segregated environments and felt comfortable *primarily* in such settings. More importantly, the female-only specificity of these friendships also enabled more mobility and access for Hindu right-wing women. As long as women *hung out* only with other women, and stayed away from *stalker-y* men, they were being safe and respectable. They were *allowed* to participate in the movement by their husbands and fathers. Their reputations were intact and they could achieve and contribute much more. In fact, they could push the

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<sup>420</sup> Conversation with Varun, New Delhi, India, 2 March 2014.

by either their irrationality or their victimhood in a larger masculine plan (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2007).

Select feminist analyses of right-wing women concede that right-wing women's political expression could be seen as empowering. However, the grounding of this expression in violence and aggression is argued to limit its ability to empower, placing right-wing women's politics well outside of the 'feminist realm' (York, 1998). Violence by right-wing women is then justified in scholarship and popular (intellectual and activist) discourse in two prominent ways. First, violence by right-wing women is seen as an act *enforced* by men in the movement through means of assertion and manipulation. Right-wing women are thus *victims* of male violence even as they espouse and engage in violence themselves. Second, as elaborated by Gentry and Sjoberg's (2007, 2015) excellent work on political violence, narratives of "motherhood, monstrosity, and whoredom" are used as justifications of right-wing women's violence. Women are seen as engaging in violence only to protect their children/families, due to mental illness and irrational evil-ness, and as a result of uncontrollable and de-formed sexual desires.<sup>31</sup> Bodies of literature on right-wing women remain silent on women's violence as political and strategic choices; they erase the politics from my interlocutors' violence, justifying violence as a distortion.

Recent scholarship in feminist international relations and feminist security studies has effectively challenged the abovementioned *deviant* portrayal of violent right-wing women and the assumption that womanhood (and especially motherhood) equates to a desire for peace (Sen, 2008; Sylvester,

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<sup>31</sup> Although motherhood is a narrative of its own, monster-hood and whoredom are also intricately linked to motherhood. Monster-hood is often constructed as a state due to lack of family and marital stability, and whoredom is constructed as flawed sexuality, with sexuality being constructed in marital terms. See Gentry and Sjoberg (2007).

boundaries of gender norms in the absence of men and avail more freedom and empowerment.<sup>421</sup>

These five arguments nuance the importance of friendship to the politics of Hindu right-wing women. They also illustrate how organizations such as the *Samiti* and *Durga Vahini* use their structures, socio-spatial formations, and events (pedagogical, charitable, and others) to enable and strengthen female friendships amongst my interlocutors. I'd now like to examine the friendships of my other set of interlocutors, Zionist settler women in Israel-Palestine.

### **The Friendships of Zionist Settler Women**

Every Friday morning, during my fieldwork in Israel-Palestine, Women in Green organised a pedagogical event at the outpost-settlement of Givat Oz V'Gaon. A group of *us* met in Central Jerusalem and took a shuttle bus (organised by WIG) to the site. The event as well as the commute were interesting *locations* to explore the friendships of my interlocutors.

On a Friday in late August, I found myself sitting next to Nili, an older woman who was widowed and had made *aaliyah* from Canada two years ago. Melanie, who had lived in the settlement of *Ma'ale Adumim*, just outside Jerusalem, for years, sat on the seat in front of us. Melanie did a quick headcount to ensure everyone was on the shuttle bus and then proceeded to catch up with Nili. The two had become close friends over the last year. I offered to move so they could sit together, but Melanie assured me that she

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<sup>421</sup> This reminded me of an incident during my secondary school years. When I was in the ninth grade (fourteen-years old), our school had organized a three-day trip for students to a nearby tourist destination. It was supposed to be a *mixed* trip with both male and female students. Surprisingly, the loudest opposition to this venture was by female students who insisted on separate male and female trips. My female friends argued that if the trip was female-only, they would have more freedom – they could dress the way they wanted and behave the way they desired. The presence of male students demanded norms of respectability that restricted female students.



2012; Parashar, 2013, 2014). These analyses challenge the *victimhood* of violent women by examining how sites, practices, and a politics of violence are also rendered as spaces for mobilization and empowerment for right-wing women. They challenge the argument of biological determinism by examining right-wing women's politics and mobilizations that are dependent on the construction and perpetual presence conflict, i.e. by elaborating on women "who are more at peace when at war" (Sen, 2008). Nuancing the politics and potential of militant women's politics, this body of work has been a significant inspiration for this thesis, its conceptualization, and its arguments.

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In this section, I have outlined the theorizations on right-wing women's politics and subjectivities through four key themes. However, I find it significant to mention that there has been crucial work outside of these themes as well. Menon's (2010) work on benevolence and charitable efforts by Hindu right-wing women, Bacchetta's (2002) work on spatial politics, gendered discourses, and the everyday politics of the Hindu right-wing organization, *Rashtra Sevika Samiti*, Sen's (2008) ethnography of *Shiv Sena* women, Mahmood's (2005) ethnography of women in Cairo's mosque movement and re-thinking agency, Deeb's (2006) work on the public activism of Shi'a women in Lebanon, and Jacoby's (2005) work on Women in Green, all find resonance in this project. My ethnography engages with these scholars and their work in great detail.

### 1.5 Unfolding the Everyday: A Chapter Outline

This thesis is composed of seven chapters that build on each other as well as converse with one another. These chapters weave together ethnography,

had no trouble turning around and speaking to Nili.<sup>422</sup> The conversation meandered to a discussion of the upcoming wedding of Melanie's son. Melanie lamented,

The girl is from Ariel.<sup>423</sup> She has thirteen siblings! Can you believe it? The family is *so* huge! Which basically means I have so much work to do. I have to prepare all these gifts and so many dishes. The cooking is so exhausting.<sup>424</sup>

Nili and Melanie continued to speak about the details of the wedding—discussing outfits, gifts, décor, and the menu—and then suddenly moved on to a detailed discussion of Obama and Netanyahu's relationship. Soon, they swerved back into an elaborate exchange on the upcoming nuptials, only to be interrupted by yet another topic of *current affairs*. By now, we had crossed the city limits of Jerusalem and the settlements just outside the city. We were on Route 60 in the occupied West Bank. As always, upon crossing *this threshold* and moving into *unsafe territory*, Melanie read out a prayer. She uttered the verses, loud and clear so everyone on the bus could hear her and chime in accordingly.<sup>425</sup> I had heard this prayer a few times and had inferred its significance, but I listened to Nili as she explained the meaning of the words,

When we travel and go into a territory where our enemy can kill us, we *have* to say this prayer. As soon as we left the city and the Jewish neighbourhoods, we *must* say these words. This way H'Shem knows that he has to protect us for now.<sup>426</sup>

<sup>422</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 22 August 2014.

<sup>423</sup> Ariel is a large settlement north of Jerusalem. Situated in the Central West Bank, it was established in 1978 and has a population of approximately 20,000 (as of 2015).

<sup>424</sup> Conversation with Nili and Melanie, Route 60, West Bank, Palestine, 22 August 2014.

<sup>425</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 22 August 2014.

<sup>426</sup> Conversation with Nili, Route 60, West Bank, Palestine, 22 August 2014.

narratives, and visuals from the *field* with theoretical analyses and methodological reflections; they move within and between the politics of women in the Hindu right-wing and Zionist settler project. In the interest of “changing the form” so the “reader can think, feel, and experience the story” and of *telling stories differently*, I build on the aforementioned overview of literature to lace theoretical threads throughout this thesis; I do not condense these threads in a single chapter or a comprehensive *theoretical framework* (Inayatullah & Dauphinee, 2016:1; Hemmings, 2011; Natanel, 2016). Through these theoretical threads and narratives, the seven chapters *unfold* the intricacies of the everyday, where the *mundane* becomes a site for complex, intricate, intimate, and uncomfortable conversations and observations; they offer what Natanel (2016:15-17, 192) calls a “tapestry of the ordinary”.

*Chapter One, Introduction: Where are the Right Wing Women?* has captured the epistemological reasoning of this project, its core questions, arguments, and frameworks. It has introduced the reader to the politics of women in Hindu right-wing and Zionist settler project; it has also highlighted the layout, form, and style of this thesis. *Chapter Two, A ‘Methodology of Unease’ and the ‘Reflexivity of Discomfort’: Thinking through Fieldwork*, follows this introduction. A short chapter, it outlines the methodology, methods, and ethical challenges of this research project. Interweaving personal-political narratives and reflections from the *field* with the feminist literature on methodology, reflexivity, and ethics, it not only introduces the readers to the *locations* and interlocutors of this research, but it also examines the minutiae of my ethnographic and visual methods. Lastly, it engages with the complexity of engaging in ethnographic research with interlocutors whose politics differ greatly from the researcher; it dissects the *unease* and *discomfort* that surrounded my *fieldwork*.

As soon as Nili finished her explanation of this important aspect of our weekly bus ride to the outpost-settlement, Melanie turned around and said,

Now where was I? ... Ah, yes, the wedding!<sup>427</sup>

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This exchange, short as it was, highlighted some of the nuances in the friendships of Zionist settler women—where intimate discussions about your child’s wedding went hand in hand with debates about politics and symbolic practices of violence. In this subsection, I want to elaborate on four points that I draw out of this and similar exchanges.

First, like Hindu right-wing women’s initiatives, events organised by Women in Green *ensured* the fostering of friendships and intimate relationships between my interlocutors. They were regular with the Friday morning event being the constant around which others were organised. They involved discussions of topics close to the personal-political realities of my interlocutors and necessitated the sharing of vulnerable and intimate stories. Furthermore, they were—logistically and spatially—conducive to socialization and the growth of friendships. To elaborate, shuttle buses and carpools were organized to the events (from Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Kiryat Arba, and even Haifa). These enabled wider attendance and provided a space for conversation (like the one between Melanie and Nili). The event began and ended with refreshments—coffee, cakes and pastries, and snacks. Women embraced each other, sharing warm hugs, and caught up with each other’s lives, gossip, and the happenings of recent days.<sup>428</sup> Alongside these joyful and intimate interactions, they discussed political issues and carried out

<sup>427</sup> Conversation with Nili and Melanie, Route 60, West Bank, Palestine, 22 August 2014.

<sup>428</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 22 August 2014.

Chapters *three* to *six* are the substantive ethnographic chapters of this thesis. Each of these four chapters uses a lens/theme to interrogate the politics of right-wing women and the production of their subjectivities.

*Chapter Three, Teaching Hindutva and Zionism: Pedagogical Practices and/of Right-Wing Women*, examines how educational strategies and practices enable the everyday politics of right-wing women. It analyses how right-wing women push the boundaries of familial/maternal national duties to carefully construct themselves as subjects who are holders of a sophisticated pedagogical practice that involves laborious planning, decision-making, performances, and narratives. Examining the construction and contestation of spaces of pedagogy of right-wing women (seminars, conferences, workshops, lectures, training camps, weekly meetings, book clubs, discussion groups etc.) and the practices these sites contain, this chapter elaborates on the relationship between my interlocutors and their pedagogical audiences, the aesthetic content as well as the materiality of their pedagogy, and dissent and disagreement within their educational spaces. *Chapter Four, The 'Good' and 'Moral' Female Subject: Charitable and Humanitarian work and/of Right-Wing Women*, argues that right-wing women construct themselves as *good* and *moral* subjects through consistent charitable and humanitarian work in their communities. I, thus, examine these charitable efforts, elaborating on *quotidian* as well as *special* practices of community work and the *visibility* of women and their politics through charity. I also argue here that charity provides a means for my interlocutors to *police* their communities and enforce *norms* of goodness as well as a way to erase and deny (injury to) the 'other'.

*Chapter Five, Affective Politics: Joyful Intimacy and Right-Wing Women*, locates the practices of intimacy in right-wing women's politics and argues that these affective practices (and the communities enable) shape and are

pedagogical, charitable, and violent initiatives—the latter strengthening the former and vice versa.

Second, like my Hindu right-wing interlocutors, Zionist settler women too *dragged* along friends and relatives that were either visiting from outside Israel or were known to them through other networks. These *visitors* often became regulars at the events organised by Women in Green, *enjoying* their initiatives and the space for socialization and intimacy they enabled. Friendships, thus, nurtured and expanded participation and commitment to the political causes of Zionist settler women.

Third, while for Hindu right-wing women, the *Samiti* and *Durga Vahini* provided a network of friendships that were useful as well as necessary when migrating to urban centres for work and education; for Zionist settler women friendships became crucial to another form of migration—the very move to Israel and the settlements. To elaborate, like in the narrative of the Abrahams, practices of care, concern, and friendships in the community replace (or at least supplement) the state's welfare with neighbours and friends stepping in to ensure that *new* settlers were comfortable and loved. I encountered similar narratives where women relied on friendships to embark on *new lives* in *Judea* and *Samaria*. I'd like to elaborate on two sets of these.

The first set of narratives is from my interactions with young women migrants from the US and Western Europe who had recently moved from their *home countries* to settlements in the Southern West Bank. Talya, an eighteen year old from the US highlighted the neoliberal logic of these migrations as she elaborated,

I moved to Israel to find a *new* life as a *new* woman looking for great opportunities for success. Israel is *the* success story—look at what they

shaped by my interlocutors' political subjectivities. Elaborating on friendship and sociability as well as leisure and pleasure among right-wing women, I argue that it is in these sites and practices of joyful intimacy that Hindu right-wing women and Zionist settler women build bonds of love and care, experience happiness and *peace*, and nurture their selves, communities, and larger political causes. To interrogate the violent politics of right-wing nationalism and settler colonialism, thus, necessitated an uncomfortable exploration of joy, friendship, fun, leisure, and affective intimacies in/of right-wing women's *everyday* lives. *Chapter Six, The Aggressive and the Everyday: Violence and the Politics of Right-Wing Women*, uses the lens of violence to not only examine the everyday mobilisations of right-wing women but to also weave (yet another) thread through the previous substantive ethnographic chapters. Examining political violence by right-wing women, this chapter argues that women in these movements mobilise on a *daily* level through various discursive and physical acts of violence and aggression. To interrogate the role of violence in forming right-wing women's subjectivities, I examine the language of violence embraced by my interlocutors, elaborate on the daily and *everyday* nature of right-wing women's violence and the strategic use of violence as means for my interlocutors to bargain and negotiate space within their movements, and offer arguments that re-formulate the debates around violence and motherhood.

The final chapter, *Chapter Seven, Conclusion: Listening to Narratives; Re-Thinking Right-Wing Women*, brings this thesis to an end. It ties together different threads that emerge through the previous chapters, summarising the key arguments that necessitate re-thinking right-wing women. It then offers three discussions that conclude this thesis—an interrogation of the sketches of a right-wing *sisterhood*, an examination of space through the everyday politics of right-wing women, and a re-framing of agency. It also highlights how this

have done in the middle of the desert. The technology industries are booming here. I want to be successful and have a great career and the best thing is I get to do it in the land where I am meant to be. I get to live in *Judea-Samaria* and be close to everything I have wanted. And I know there will be many girls like me—I will make good friends; I already know so many people here through family.<sup>429</sup>

Upon arrival, Talya joined an *ulpan* (Hebrew language school) in Jerusalem and met Abigail, Eva, and Maya. Abigail was from the US as well and had decided to make *aaliyah* to start a new life in her early twenties.<sup>430</sup> The *love of her life* had left her heartbroken and she decided to leave her old life behind and *finally* do what she had wanted to do for years, live in *Kiryat Arba*. As we talked, she confessed to me,

I was really hoping that I would make new friends when I moved and start a new life. And I did. I am so thankful. Now I can forget that bastard.<sup>431</sup>

Eva, a stylish young woman in her early twenties, was from Nice in France. When I interviewed her in a café on Yafo Street in Jerusalem she quickly informed me that the reasons for her move to Israel were real and very political. She elaborated,

Europe is going down. Their time is over. The financial crisis and the racism—it is too much. There is so much anti-Semitism in France and attacks on Jews are going on everywhere. On top of it, there are hardly any jobs. I want to be in a place where I can have a future. And I want to be in a land where Jews are loved and respected. I want to live among *my people* and not in some crowded city—but in a small

<sup>429</sup> Interview with Talya, Jerusalem, Palestine, 9 September 2014.

<sup>430</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 9 September 2014.

<sup>431</sup> Conversation with Abigail, Jerusalem, Palestine, 9 September 2014.

thesis speaks to the discipline of feminist international relations and reflects on the process of narrating narratives.

community where people cared about each other and looked after their friends.<sup>432</sup>

Maya was nineteen and from France; she made *aaliyah* as she was tired of her stepmother and father and wanted a life of freedom. She identified as national-religious and said she always knew if she moved to Israel, she would live in *Judea* and *Samaria*. She also added that her family—of only two—had suffocated her all the time but here, even though she had “a family of many friends” she felt good and happy.<sup>433</sup>

All four of these young women had begun to be regulars at the various events organised by Women in Green when I conducted my fieldwork in 2014. They had *settled* into their *new* lives, chasing neoliberal notions of happiness and the *good life* while fulfilling their political and religious desires and fighting personal demons—all of these being facilitated through their kinships and friendships (Ahmed, 2010). Moreover, as elaborated in *Chapter Three*, the leaders of Women in Green had an acute awareness of the reasons for these migrations and incorporated elements that resonated with the stories of my young interlocutors into their pedagogical events. In other words, Women in Green mediated these intimacies through educational, symbolic, and performative elements.

The aforementioned young women, few in number, combined their politics with their neoliberal aspirations of a life *they wanted to have*. The second set of narratives I want to present here is from older women, whose migration to Israel and settlements combined their politics with an aversion to neoliberal society and the realisation of a life *they missed out on*. To elaborate on this, I’d like to highlight the narratives of Nira and Raya here.

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<sup>432</sup> Conversation with Eva, Jerusalem, Palestine, 17 September 2014.

<sup>433</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 16 September 2014.

## 2

### A 'Methodology of Unease' and the 'Reflexivity of Discomfort': Thinking through Fieldwork<sup>32</sup>

*"The 'field' is a mirage of authenticity and true discovery, and the proofs we bring back more like fragments to be stitched into a story that will always be unstable."*

- Kirby, P. (2016:135)

#### 2.1 Before, During, After – Here, There, Everywhere

In this short chapter – an early interlude, if I may – I'd like to take the reader through the minutiae of how the 'fieldwork' for this thesis unfolded and what this unfolding entailed in terms of methods, ethics, emotions, and feminist reflexivity. Believing strongly that the research process cannot simply be divided into time spent framing questions and engaging with literature *before* going to the 'field', preparing *for* the 'field', time *in* the 'field', and life and writing *after* the 'field'; this chapter avoids neat temporal and spatial linearity. As the *before* merges with the *during* and the *after* never fully arrives, this chapter is divided into three brief sections that intertwine engagement with feminist literature on methods and ethics with reflections from the 'field'. Section 2.2 outlines the timeline and physical *locations* of fieldwork and elaborates on moments of *arrival, departure, and transit* in the 'field'. Section 2.3

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<sup>32</sup> Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern coined the phrase 'methodology of unease' as they conducted research on sexual violence and wartime rape in the DRC. The authors most recently discuss it in Eriksson Baaz, M. & Stern, M. (2016). The phrase refers to a politics of unease that accompanies researching unsettling subjects and turns into an effective and palpable methodological tool that guides the research project.

I credit the phrase 'reflexivity of discomfort' to Hamdan, AN (2009). Anita Hamdan describes the reflexivity of discomfort as a reflexivity during research that pushes the researcher to the uncomfortable and the uncertain. Discomfort, thus, allows the researcher to accept the difficult and emotional nature of some research projects and transform into a tool for ethical and reflexive considerations rather than a hindrance.

Nira was a very elegant sixty-year old woman from the US who stood out at the Women in Green events. She was charming, outspoken, gentle and warm, and very well dressed. She wore what she called "her hippy skirts" in beautiful colours and patterns, covering her hair in pastel-coloured veils in a manner that showcased her stunning and long earrings. She always wore dark lipstick and eye shadow, her fingers adorned with gemstone rings, and her arms ringing with bangles. She was soft-spoken and attentive, showering love, affection, and concern on everyone she encountered. Although, it was very easy for everyone to like her and feel at ease around her, Nira and I got along exceptionally well. She lived in Jerusalem but was very active in the settler communities in the Southern West Bank and very crucial to Women in Green. We always found each other at events, engaging in long conversations.<sup>434</sup>

On a September evening in Jerusalem, I met Nira in a park. We found a bench and sat down so I could interview her. She looked at her phone as we talked and sighed. She blurted out, "*Do you know that guy who comes to the Women in Green events? He is one of the two men who come there regularly, the American one, he calls himself Nathan I think and wears glasses*".<sup>435</sup> I nodded; she added, "*Well he wants to date me!*" She seemed exasperated yet pleased; I laughed and blurted out a silly *wow that is interesting!* She continued, "*I'll tell you what and you better write this in your thesis – if I am going to share my bed with anyone other than my books, there has to be more to the guy*".<sup>436</sup> We both laughed and she continued,

I was married for years. I had come to Israel as a young girl; I was just out of high school and I lived in a kibbutz for a few years. Those were

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<sup>434</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 5 September 2014.

<sup>435</sup> Conversation with Nira, Jerusalem, Palestine, 16 September 2014.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

examines the minutiae of my methods and the relevance of a feminist ‘methodology of unease’ to this thesis. *Section 2.4* concludes this chapter by examining ethical issues linked to this project and offering an engagement with the ‘reflexivity of discomfort’.

## 2.2 A Timeline of ‘Fieldwork’: Arrivals, Departures, and Transits

To offer some calm in the disarray this chapter tries to capture, I’d like to indicate the timeline and physical location of ‘fieldwork’ and highlight a few of the broader choices I made. The narrative and ethnographic research for this thesis was carried out between August 2013 and November 2014 in India and in Israel-Palestine.

From August 2013 to July 2013 and in November 2014, I carried out ethnographic research in various locations in India, namely, Mumbai, Pune, Thane, Kalyan, Nashik, and Delhi. These sites were chosen because of three reasons. First, the state/province of Maharashtra (which includes the cities of Mumbai, Pune, Thane, Kalyan, and Nashik) has a strong legacy of Hindu right-wing politics (with some of the key organizations having their foundational chapters in these locations). Delhi, as the capital, was a centre for Hindu right-wing organizing in 2013/2014 due to the campaigning and subsequent election of Narendra Modi, the current Prime Minister of India, who represents the BJP, the parliamentary face of the Hindu right-wing. Second, these cities see significant participation by women in the Hindu right-wing, which made research *easier* in the sense of *reaching out* and *finding* interlocutors. Third and last, Mumbai is my *hometown* and Delhi is a city I lived in for years; the familiarity of roads, spaces, language, food, and above all, family and friends were not only necessary (from a logistical point of

the days—they really were the best years of my life. I was *so* young, *so* beautiful, and had *so* much to look forward to. A whole life was ahead. Then I got married to someone and he wanted to live in the US and so we did. We lived the great American dream. I had three children, I worked, and he worked. He cheated on me; the marriage ended. I kept going, waiting to *return* to Israel. I followed all the news—I care so much about this place and wanted to be useful to this land. My children have finished university, they are all married—they have their lives and I am *finally* free. I can now live for myself in a place where there was more to life than chasing money and cars and houses. I can explore the life I *did not live*. The life I left thirty years ago. So here I am, where it all started, where my heart belongs.<sup>437</sup>

Raya, like Nira, was in her sixties and she had moved to Kiryat Arba in her late fifties from New York City. In an interview in her home, she sat in front of me, her back to the wall of her living room adorned with two big and bright red stickers—I love Israel and I Love NY. She said,

To be honest, my reasons are selfish. I was always a part of Jewish organisations in the US and I cared deeply about Israel. I wanted to be involved in the struggle for our homeland. But I never moved. Then my husband got sick. He had cancer and I watched him die in our family home. For six months, he suffered. When he died, I just could not live there anymore. Too many memories. My heart was breaking. I had to leave. So I decided why not go where I wanted to go. A place where I can be involved in political things and a place where I will find friends in women like me and of my age. And here I am.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>437</sup> Conversation with Nira, Jerusalem, Palestine, 16 September 2014.

<sup>438</sup> Conversation with Raya, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 14 September 2014.



view) to carry out the research but were also sites of respite for me. I arrived in Mumbai in August 2013 and contacted local chapters of Hindu right-wing women's organizations. Through a consistent effort of *reaching out* and *showing up*, I encountered my interlocutors, *witnessed* their everyday lives and politics over months, and built relationships and networks with them. I travelled to Pune (a few times), Delhi (for a few weeks), Kalyan (for the Hindu right-wing camp), and Nashik (a few times), conducting 'fieldwork' in all these cities. Due to a health crisis, I had to *pause* my fieldwork in June 2014; I departed from India in mid-July 2014, and re-visited Delhi in November 2014.

In Israel and Palestine, research was carried out in Jerusalem and the settlements in the Southern West Bank (along Route 60 from Jerusalem to Hebron) between July 2014 and October 2014. The geographical decision was made as the *entry point* to my interlocutors in this region was the organization that is central to this thesis, Women In Green/Women for Israel's Tomorrow. Based in Jerusalem and settlements/outposts around the Gush Etsyon block, the organization was most active in the Southern West Bank. This 'geography' expanded as I met Zionist settler women from the settlement of Kiryat Arba near Hebron as well as women who had left these spaces and settled in Tel Aviv and Haifa. My 'field' thus moved between, within, and around these sites and the roads, checkpoints, walls, and fences that framed them. It should also be mentioned that while I had wanted to stay longer in Israel and Palestine, the Israeli state only granted me a short-term single stay visa. Although the months were fewer, the intensity of research – *if that can be measured at all* – was severe.

For Nira, Raya, and several others like them, *aaliyah* to Israel had been in the making for decades. They had memories of the spirit of camaraderie that they argued *made* Israel. For them, Israel was a place where people—people like them—lived together, fought against violence, prayed together, rejected the materialism of capitalism, and experienced a community and happiness together. Several scholars have elaborated on the importance of (women's) friendships and kinships in migrant communities (Mirza, 1997; Bastida, 2001; Mand, 2006). Drawing on this work, I argue here that (constructed) memories of friendship as well as the tangible and affective experiences of friendship upon migration facilitated the arrival, presence, and integration of my older female Zionist interlocutors into settlements and organisations like Women in Green. On the other hand, events organised by Zionist settler women and Women in Green became sites for these newly relocated women to forge friendships and finally live the lives *they never got to live*. As Nira said,

I remember the Israel of the kibbutz from my youth—we belonged together. That is the Israel I heard about when I grew up from parents, relatives, and friends. That is the Israel I had pictures and memories of after I lived there. I was in the feminist movement in the 1960s and 70s in the US—we did all the protests and the bra burning and went to music festivals, took drugs, and what not. But it was *all* false sisterhood. It was *all* rubbish. I could *only* think of Israel when it came to finding long lasting *real* friendship, love, and a community.<sup>439</sup>

The fourth and final point I'd like to put forth regarding the friendships of Zionist settler women is that three particularities of the national-religious settler community not only facilitated but also *necessitated* and strengthened female friendships. First, my interlocutors were religious (although they

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<sup>439</sup> Conversation with Nira, Jerusalem, Palestine, 16 September 2014.

### 2.3 A 'Methodology of Unease'

Zalewski (2006:45) gives an easy answer to the question - *what is methodology?* She defines methodology as the "ology of method" that was both a theory and analysis of the complexities of the research process as well as the research process itself. Methodology allows us to question the very questions we ask, the way we ask them, the choices we make, the *answers* we seek, and the insufficiency of these *answers* (Ackerly, Stern & True, 2006). In this section, I underline the idea of a feminist methodology, the details of my methods, and the undertone of 'unease' that framed my 'fieldwork'.

#### "But why do you, a feminist, want to research these women"?

I have been asked the abovementioned question dozens of time; it has been thrown at me in conferences, classrooms, meetings, small talk, introductions, job interviews, and conversations; it has taken on a tone of bewilderment, concern, curiosity, intellectual interest, shock, anger, and utter disgust. This question has compelled me to ask – *What does it mean to do feminist research? Why is my research feminist? What on earth does a feminist methodology entail?*

Sandra Harding (1987) asserts that there is no *specific* feminist methodology; Tickner (2006) adds that feminists do not see it desirable to construct *a* unique methodology. It is, in fact, the multiplicity of unclassifiable and manifold methods and methodologies that makes feminist scholarship powerful (Zalewski, 2006). While there is no *separate* feminist methodology, I argue, that there exist perspectives on methodology that are *distinctly* feminist; these form the backbone of my research process and its remnants in five crucial ways.

First, feminist perspectives interrogate the power of knowledge claims, guiding the research questions, their origins and significance (Ackerly, Stern & True, 2006). *Why did I ask these particular questions? Why were they not asked*

consciously demarcated themselves from orthodox Jewish women) and their lives were organized around sex-segregated Judaic rituals (Jacoby, 2005). Their social lives were intricately tied to their religious lives and thus, encompassed spaces of camaraderie and intimacy with other women. Second, like my Hindu right-wing interlocutors, Zionist settler women conceptualized the self through relationships of connectivity (Joseph, 1993). Networks of friendship, kinship, and family were crucial to their daily interactions, mundane and special practices, and identity-formations. Third, as elaborated by Gordon (2008:118) and Weizman (2012:132), settlements in the West Bank are located on hilltops and are organized in a manner that cleaves Palestinian village curtailing Palestinian movement and development, renders them tools of surveillance situated at vantage points, and allows them to ethnically police the region. The settlements were constructed with homes and roads in rings with an inward as well as outward gaze (Weizman, 2012:132). The inward gaze reinforced the sense of community and intimacy and allowed the policing of fellow inhabitants. The outward gaze "orients the view of the inhabitants towards the surrounding landscape" allowing settlers to not only monitor the West Bank but to also visualize and articulate their *perceived* isolation on the *frontier* (ibid.). These inward and outward gazes, I argue, necessitated and facilitated friendships and intimacy, *forcing* a community to rely on each other and strengthen their shared bonds and dependencies. It was in the spatial organisation of this *everyday* life and its "small rituals, travel, work and spare time" that Zionist settler women's friendships and politics were transformed and sustained (Weizman, 2012:132).

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This section has examined the friendships and social lives of Hindu right-wing and Zionist settler women, arguing that these *locations* of the intimacies of *everyday* life are significant to the politics of right-wing women. I highlight

*before? Who am I to ask them?* Questioning the questions has allowed me to examine the silences in feminist literature vis-à-vis *difficult* women, reflect on the personal-political reasons for my “feminist curiosities”, and weave these threads throughout this thesis (Enloe, 2004).

Second, feminist perspectives trouble boundaries, dichotomies, marginalization, and silences in academic inquiry. They challenge privileged and “unseen biases in the way knowledge has been constructed across disciplines” (Tickner, 2006:21); they include marginalized narratives; they “note the silences and hear the unspoken” (Parashar, 2016:60); they unpack “how subject positions in varied matrices of domination are always shaped by intersectional positions” (Wibben, 2016:24). In this research project, feminist perspectives have compelled me to pay attention to *uncomfortable* narratives that have been excluded by researchers; they have pushed me to challenge numerous binaries and dichotomies; and they have guided me as I have noted the silences, expressions, emotions, affects, surroundings, movement, bodies, and power relationships through the months of ‘fieldwork’.

Third, feminist perspectives inform the ethics of (this) research and wider academic (and activist) engagement. Jacoby (2006:173) elaborates that feminist research “is not a linear process of confirming hypotheses but rather a set of positionings through which researcher and researched negotiate with each other and in doing so establish their subjectivities”. The ‘fieldwork’ for this thesis was carried out with an acute awareness of my positionalities, privileges, biases, and politics and the relationships of power they produced; it insisted on the “situatedness” of the knowledges I was *creating* (Haraway, 1988:583), it compelled me to place myself on the same critical plane as my interlocutors and thread reflections from the field throughout my writing.

the need to move beyond examinations of friendship in international relations that remain limited to inter-state friendships/alliances and relationships between macro-actors. I assert that politics and violence are enabled by the friendships and affective intimacies of other *ordinary* and *everyday* actors, such as my interlocutors. I also argue that friendship and sociability are interesting sites that contain competing discourses of the right-wing (from traditionalist nationalism to neoliberalism), intersectional plural identities and narratives of women, and *everyday* bargains and negotiations by women. Furthermore, as the narratives in this section have illustrated, friendship and the intimacy it enables are crucial tools for right-wing women as they migrate (within and beyond state boundaries), construct *new* homes/homelands, and embrace notions of independence and empowerment that both submit to neoliberalism as well as resist it.

Before I move on to the next section, I’d like to put forth two final arguments here. First, in the last two years there has been plenty of media and policy speak on an Indo-Israel alliance and friendship. While this reportage and analysis focuses on state actors and politicians/businessmen, it could benefit from an insight into the budding (online) friendships between Hindu right-wing women and Zionist settler women.<sup>440</sup> These interactions enable *new* forms of international relations and foreign policy/politics that often escape the radars of think-tank analysts and news reporters. Second, while I have elaborated on friendships in this section, I would also like to highlight that the *absence* of friendships with the Palestinian/Muslim/Christian/anti-national ‘other’ and the *unfriending* of this ‘other’ are also crucial to right-wing women’s politics. *Shedding* and *ridding* your life of any friendly connections with the ‘other’ is seen as a rite of passage, a coming of age, and an embracing

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<sup>440</sup> I explore these interactions and the idea of a right-wing *sisterhood* in the conclusion to this thesis.

Fourth, feminist perspectives ensure that research needs “to remain uncomfortably lodged at the intersections of multiple fields of scholarship” and confront “a world where feelings, emotions, and reason are central to research” (Wibben, 2016:22; Sylvester, 2012:87). This research project and the process of ‘fieldwork’ has been inter-disciplinary and has regularly interrogated its limits and boundaries so as to remain “true to feminist methodological and political commitments and to continual, radical, and deliberate critique, allowing for only temporal resting points” (Wibben 2010:114).

Fifth and final, feminist perspectives disallow me to *conclude* this research, file this thesis away, and transform it into *just* a qualification on my résumé. My conclusions in this document have highlighted the intricacies of everyday politics of Hindu right-wing and Zionist settler women. However, they have also birthed *new* questions, necessitated more exploration, and reasserted that feminist research is not a neat and linear process that offers *objective solutions* and the comfort of finality (Zalewski, 2006).

### **The Minutiae of a Myriad of ‘my’ Methods**

*“Daily life is not a tidy house where china ornaments are arranged in tight rows for display. In daily life, china is shattered, the shelves are knocked down, the dirt is tracked across the carpet, and screams shatter the mirror.”*

- de Montigny (1995:223)

For this research project, I adopt ethnographic, narrative, and discourse-based methods that allow me to *travel* across temporal, spatial, and intellectual boundaries and *enter* the lives of my interlocutors. I draw inspiration from

of right-wing women’s politics. Chinmayee, the young schoolgirl in Nisha Pahuja’s documentary, *The World Before Her*, who is attending a *Durga Vahini* training camp, reminds us of this. She smiles, looks into the camera, and proclaims with beaming pride,

I don’t have any Muslim friends. I am very proud of that. I used to have a few when I was even younger. But not anymore.<sup>441</sup>

### **5.3 Leisure and Pleasure on the Right**

Amidst the seemingly upper class and elite ladies at the women’s conference at the World Hindu Congress, a group of young women stood out. A group of six, they were from the city of Nashik in Maharashtra; they were dressed elegantly in simple cotton saris with minimal jewellery; they neither carried designer purses nor the latest gadgets. Over dinner on the first day of the conference, I joined their table, feeling much more at ease with them than with other attendees. They mentioned that they were *Durga Vahini* leaders from their ‘area’ and had recently also started a local chapter of the Hindu Women’s Forum; they handed me business cards of this *new* organization.<sup>442</sup> As we spoke through the elaborate dinner, Pranoti, a thirty-two year old woman from this group, confessed,

We feel a little strange here. It is good to see some familiar faces like Shantakaji and some other senior ladies. But mostly, we are out of place. This is our first big conference. Everyone is staying in this five star hotel or somewhere else, we are staying at a women’s hostel and we came by sleeper-class<sup>443</sup> train, the cheapest option.<sup>444</sup>

<sup>441</sup> The film was released in 2012. See more about the film on its website - <http://www.worldbeforeher.com/>

<sup>442</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 21 November 2014.

<sup>443</sup> The cheapest *reserved* option on long-distance trains in India.

<sup>444</sup> Conversation with Pranoti, New Delhi, India, 21 November 2014.

feminist anthropology<sup>33</sup> and ethnographic and narrative approaches to feminist and postcolonial international relations and politics<sup>34</sup> to examine the nuances, the clutter, and the messiness of the *everyday*, to question elegant binaries and dichotomies, and to reflect on the chaotic epistemological, methodological, and ethical personal-political dilemmas at every step. I also use narrative as a form and style of writing that conveys experience, emotions, affect, movement, unease, and discomfort, and challenges the *norms* and rigidities of knowledge production and academia. In this subsection, I will elaborate on the details of the methods I use and the challenges they entailed in/off the ‘field’.

#### On Multiple Methods

In her research on the nuclear warfare industry, Cohn (2006:107) elaborates that she sees the “multiplicity of methods as the juxtaposition and layering of many different windows” that allow her to identify patterns among various interlocutors at multiple sites. This research project has been *located* at multiple sites and has necessitated the use of multiple methods (from interviews to *hanging out* to discourse analysis) where “different windows” are layered together and speaking to each other, their conversations weaving the *larger* picture. ‘Fieldwork’, however, resulted in piles of fieldnotes, heaps of printed material collected from India and Israel-Palestine, scraps of scribbling, numerous images, and video footage. Diaries, notes, brochures, pamphlets, books, and digitized visuals *hold* the emanations from my time in the ‘field’. Multiple methods and “different windows” often melted into one and sometimes did not speak to each other at all during this project. Disentangling these methods and narratives has, thus, been an exercise of methodology in itself. *What material is to be included? Why? Which stories are*

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<sup>33</sup> See Scheper-Hughes, 1993; Nordstorm, 1997; Al-Ali, 2007 etc.

<sup>34</sup> Cohn, 1987; Enloe, 1989; Wibben, 2011; Parashar, 2014; Natanel, 2016; Dauphinee, 2013 etc.

Her friend and colleague, Deepika, thirty-one years old, chimed in,

But it is really fun! We had a great time on the train. The thing is, we all have husbands and children. I have only one child, but Pranoti and Madhu have two each and the others have three each! We spend so much time with the kids—the school, the tuition classes, at home. And we spend so much time taking care of family and house related things and then doing all this Hindu women’s stuff. Just to get away from all that, even for five-six days, is great. We relaxed on the long train journey [over 22 hours]. We had packed some food, we drank a lot of *chai*, we read books, we gossiped and talked, and we slept so much!<sup>445</sup>

Over the next two days, I stayed close to this group, chatting with them through the events, joining them for lunch, dinner, and tea breaks, and having long conversations at the end of the long and winding days. I noticed that although they periodically checked on their husbands and children (and mentioned them a lot), these three days of the conference and the two days of the journey were not only spaces of political right-wing women’s organising for them but also sites of *getting away* from monotony and the domestic, of leisure and pleasure, and of friendship and intimacy. They were living together in a dormitory at a women’s hostel, staying up late to talk and share laughs, something they had not done with their girlfriends since before their marriages (or ever).<sup>446</sup> They were travelling across the country, over a thousand kilometres away from familial commitments and the drudgery of everyday duties and responsibilities, *by themselves*, with no men/elders to chaperone them. They attended every session and event, interjecting with their points, intervening to share their experiences of *Durga Vahini* in Nashik, asking questions and socializing with some of the other women. They looked

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<sup>445</sup> Conversation with Deepika, New Delhi, India, 21 November 2014.

<sup>446</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 22 November 2014.

*discarded into the depths of my notebooks and computer?* I have paid close attention to issues of anonymity, power relations, and emotions when making these decisions. I have also attempted to let these various methods merge, depart, and antagonize each other, shaping the narratives without rules and edicts. Perhaps, that is the magic of multiple methods, you never know where one “window” ends and the other begins.

#### On Interviews as Method

Feminist research is a dialectical process that involves *listening* to interlocutors and making experience *hearable* (Nielsen, 1990). Interviews are one way of doing so. Before I embarked on ‘fieldwork’, I reflected on a few aspects of this method. *What will interviews bring to this project? Who will I interview? Where will I interview them? In their homes? In my home? In a ‘public’ place? What will I ask? How will I listen? How will I react? How will I write down what I am hearing?*

In the ‘field’, I conducted over fifty *formal* semi-structured interviews. I gained informed consent from my interlocutors, took notes, used a recorder when permissible, and reflected on the interview as soon as it ended. My interviews went beyond *designated* and *fixed* questions, moving beyond the area of research, turning into conversations. My conversations with my interlocutors, in turn, often turned into semi-structured interviews. This *fluidity* not only allowed my interviewees to be co-producers of knowledge and narrative but they also allowed “previously occluded parts of women’s experiences to be brought to light” (Parashar, 2016:64). It also helped me determine wider contexts and gain a more nuanced understanding of the locations and politics I found myself in.

In these interactions, I paid attention to silences and absences, differences in tone and body language, expressions and emotions, gestures and intensity, and contradictions and confusions. My interlocutors’ responses depended on

to each other for support and amplification of their points; they took dozens of photographs, posing solo, alongside speakers, and with one another in all possible permutations.<sup>447</sup>

These young Hindu right-wing women had found the conference to be a site not only for work, pedagogy, and political organising but also for leisure, friendship, and intimacy. A deeply political educational event had facilitated practices of leisure, relaxation, and female bonding; these practices in turn nurtured an intimacy and camaraderie that strengthened their right-wing politics. Both of these behove an understanding of the relationship between leisure and politics (of the right-wing). As this relationship remains unaddressed in the interdisciplinary literature on right-wing women, I turn to the literature on gender in *leisure studies*.

Scholarship on leisure and gender has asserted the importance of leisure and pleasure and the friendships they contain (as well as enable) to the well-being of women (Green, 1998; Aitchison, 1999; Scraton & Watson, 1998; Khan, 2011; Watson & Scraton, 2013). Early research on gender and leisure primarily included work from a standpoint feminist perspective (Talbot, 1979; Dixey & Talbot, 1982; Green, 1990), research on tourism and women from a Marxist lens of inequalities and labour (Richter, 1995; Swain, 1995), and the study of men and sport (Spracklen, 1995). The post-structuralist turn to studying both gender and leisure resulted in *new* bodies of literature. There emerged work on how gender relations intersected with socio-spatial configurations and contributed to leisure relations. Aitchison (1999) elaborates on these arguing for the formation of new cultural geographies of leisure that not only focused on class and social and material differences but also offered a reading of

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<sup>447</sup> Ibid.

where we were, who was around us, how they felt that day, and a variety of unidentifiable factors. In India, the lack of privacy in public as well as familial spaces affected what could be shared and I often had to conduct interviews in truncated parts. In Israel-Palestine, privacy was not an issue; however, I often felt that the interviews were *rehearsed performances*, with my interlocutors *presenting* themselves in certain ways and saying what they thought wanted to be heard (Jacoby, 2006:162). To overcome this challenge, I relied more on open-ended exchanges and conversations rather than *formal* interviews. Finally, it has to be noted that interviews contain power relations that shape testimonies; the respondent can reveal or conceal what she wants (as can the interviewer) (Ackerly, Stern & True, 2006). While I have attempted to explicitly mention this in the narratives in this thesis, I want to confess to the reader that as much as I listened, there were a few “moments of failure” in the interviewing process (Eriksson Baaz & Stern, 2016:144).

#### On Participant Observation and ‘Hanging Out’ as Method

This thesis examines the everyday politics of right-wing women; by focusing on the *everyday*, the mundane, the quotidian, and its nuances, my questions necessitated *participant observation* and *hanging out* as methods. While semi-structured interviews gave me a great deal of insight into the lives of my interlocutors, it was only by *observing* and *participating* in the everyday – its rituals, procedures, routines, symbols, and cycles – that I could even begin to comprehend the politics of right-wing women. I joined the daily activities of my interlocutors and their organizations, attending meetings, protests and rallies, educational sessions, charitable efforts, and moments of friendship, leisure, and pleasure. I *witnessed* numerous relationships, writing detailed notes on what I was seeing, *feeling*, thinking and how I *fit* into the lives of my interlocutors. I *listened* to conversations, noted down *silences*, elaborated on the *banal* and *trivial*; I mapped patterns through these observations, paying

power, gender, and sexuality as they intersected with formations of leisure and pleasure. These “new ways of seeing leisure” necessitated new questions on the spatialities and embodiment of fashion, sex tourism, cyber-leisure, lesbian and gay leisure, and youth cultures (Aitchison, 1993:35). Elaborating specifically on women’s leisure, it also examined how sites of female leisure and friendship facilitated the re-conceptualization of masculinities and femininities and the re-organization of social and cultural lives (Green, 1998:183).

Rojek (2005, 2010:22) suggests that leisure can be regarded as a political project and “a condition that is the product of inter-relations between many factors” that constitutes subjects. Building on Rojek; Watson and Scraton (2013) argue for an “intersectional” understanding of leisure, where one can examine *some* shared gendered experiences related to safety, constraint, and gendered divisions of labour in the home but also interrogate experienced difference in terms of age, class, race, sexuality, (dis)ability, ethnicity, religion, sex and gender. Women, thus, adopted a wide variety of strategies to negotiate leisure depending on their positionality (ibid.). This call for an intersectional and embodied understanding of leisure enables three things. It allows us to witness how leisure can be simultaneously liberating and constraining (Watson & Scraton, 2013:42). It allows us to look at masculinities and femininities instead of the binary of men and women (Messner, 2006; Carrington, 2010). And finally, it dispels dichotomies around the gendered separation of the public and private in not only leisure but also the domestic and work (Scraton & Watson, 1998:136).

I draw on these *new* post-structuralist bodies of work on leisure and gender in this section to examine sites and practices of leisure and pleasure of right-wing women. These bodies have been extensive and they *all* affirm that



attention to objects, bodies, emotions, tones, intensities, and all that which is the “silent unspoken, not easily observable, but fundamentally real” (Hearn and Parker, 2001:12).

While *participant observation* and *hanging out* have rendered these narratives rich, it is these two methods that have also raised numerous ethical questions for me. I *listened* to a language of violence; I *observed* the construction of discourses of hatred; I *witnessed* aggression and brutality; I *befriended* a politics of cultural nationalism and settler colonialism. My ‘fieldnotes’ remind me of the *observation* in participant observation; I continually remind myself of the *participant* in participant observation. While I did not participate in acts of violence and *listened* more than I spoke; there remains an unresolved unease that hangs over the time I engaged with these methods.

#### On Visual Ethnography as Method

Visual Ethnography can be broadly described as the intersection of visual studies and ethnography (Pink, 2006). It involves two major approaches; producing visual material as a method of *doing* ethnography and understanding the construction, appropriation, and content of visuals as well as the settings and means in which they are produced (ibid.). In an attempt to *tell stories differently* and write visual histories that accompany textual and verbal ones, I used both these approaches during ‘fieldwork’ (Hemmings, 2011, Pinney, 2004).

For the first, I filmed several segments with my interlocutors, allowing them to direct the camera and choose how they wanted to be represented. I also composed hundreds of images, a few of which are a part of the final thesis. Many of these images were co-created with my interlocutors and showcased their representations of themselves and their homes, their political spaces, and

leisure and pleasure were political projects. However, they leave a few questions unanswered. *How do sites and practices of politics ‘simultaneously’ enable leisure and pleasure? How do the embodied and affective experiences of leisure and intimacy strengthen particular political projects like cultural nationalism and settler colonialism? How do right-wing women leaders conceive of a politics that added fun, relaxation, and joy to the everyday lives of the subjects they encountered? What subjectivities do the confluence of leisure and politics produce?* This section, thus, falls into the silences of this literature and offers two things—an examination of the formations of leisure and pleasure amongst Zionist Settler women and an elaboration on the sites of leisure and pleasure for Hindu right-wing women. It then connects the two and offers a succinct concluding discussion on resistance, morality, religion, and the leisurely politics of right-wing women.

#### Leisure, Pleasure, and the Politics of Zionist Settler Women

In *Chapter One* of this thesis, I presented a narrative of the establishment of the outpost-settlement of Givat Oz V’Gaon.<sup>448</sup> I’d like to re-visit and build on the threads of leisure in that narrative.

As my interlocutors *settled* and ‘re-claimed’ the hill at the site “where the boys had been taken” they had a few discussions on how to design this space. In a conversation in August, Sarai elaborated on this,

We wanted this space to be our new meeting point... it was easy to reach, close to Jerusalem, *Kiryat Arba*, and right next to *the Gush*. We wanted to establish ourselves here and make it our one stop office, event site, and the place where we met and planned everything. But it also had to be more than that. We needed to attract people and give

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<sup>448</sup> See *Chapter One*, p. 14

the hundreds of objects that littered their lives. I am aware that although my interlocutors *directed* some of these visuals, ultimately, I walk away with the files and the power to edit and (re)frame what I saw. The images that I include in this thesis (and display in various venues) have, thus, all been approved by my interlocutors. For the second, both the Hindu right-wing and the Zionist settler project are invested in the proliferation of visuals. These visuals include symbols, flags, maps, depictions of the ‘other’, images, paintings, sculptures, and films; they are found on walls, books, brochures, pamphlets, calendars, decorative items etc. These visuals are *extremely* relevant to this thesis as they encapsulate the various dimensions of the everyday politics of my interlocutors. In this thesis, I include several of these visuals, highlighting where I *located* them and tying them into my narratives and analyses.

#### On Discourse Analysis as Method

Referring to her research experience with (male) professionals of the nuclear weapons industry, Cohn (1987:687-689) elaborates on how her residence in *their* discourse community transformed her questions. Instead of asking – *how can they think this way?* – she began to ask – *how can any of us think this way?* The power of language and discourse in shaping how and what people think was rendered central to her examinations. Notwithstanding that Cohn’s research context is vastly different from mine, eerily enough, my questions about right-wing women underwent a similar transformation.

Gentry (2016:40) elaborates that feminists recognize that discourse, as written, spoken, textual, or visual, reveals constructions of power, legitimacy, and status. Discourse analysis, as a method, takes the text and assumes that language and images have meaning “and are used to accomplish actions” (ibid.). It also traces the manner in which knowledge is produced and nuances

them something more than *our politics*. So we decided to *brand* it as a nature park, forest and camping site, a garden, a picnic area, and a place where women could come and relax and enjoy the green. This way our members could *enjoy* their time here and also bring along other women who were not very much into politics but maybe would get more involved if they came here and saw what we were doing.<sup>449</sup>

The *leaders* and senior members of Women in Green, thus, “conceived” this space as one where politics and leisure intermingled (Lefebvre, 1991). They placed benches and picnic tables all around the site; they isolated areas for pitching tents, camping, and building fires; they constructed swings and put up hammocks for relaxation and conversation; they built a canopy for birthday parties and other celebrations; they *greened* this space, making it attractive and soothing. At one end of this site, they constructed a playpen for children; it had slides, a jungle gym, swings, a sand pit, and lots of toys and games; it was colourful and safe. Every afternoon, Women in Green organised activities for the children in this playpen; these ranged from balloon making workshops to storytelling to pita making to singing and dancing. The *house* at the centre of the site was then *transformed* into a café and library. A workbench was installed and behind it they placed coffee machines, kettles, an oven, a microwave, shelves, a cash machine, and a small refrigerator. The café served coffee, tea, and cool drinks alongside a selection of freshly baked desserts and snacks. A few tables and chairs were inside the café surrounded by shelves filled with political and religious books, board games, and scattered toys. Outside the café, more tables and chairs were arranged in different formations so women could sit and relax as they sipped their beverages. In the corner of this area, a permanent table, leased to different

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<sup>449</sup> Conversation with Sarai, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 11 August 2014.

the power structures implicit in this production. I use the term discourse to describe the production and re-production of meaning, which delimits the realm of understanding, action, and imagination within a particular framework and structure (Eriksson-Baaz & Stern, 2016; Foucault, 1991). Using discourse theory put forth by Laclau and Mouffe (2001), in this thesis, I analyse oral, printed, and visual material collected from the 'field.' As right-wing women negotiate with male-formulated structures of their movements, discourse becomes a central point of contestation between my interlocutors and the men in their projects as well as between my interlocutors and the 'other'. Thus, feminist discourse analysis accompanies my ethnographic methods to disentangle the narratives of right-wing women and the power relations they contain and enable.

#### On Multi-Sited Research

Describing her research with defence intellectuals, Cohn (2006:92) writes, "*My subject has been a moving target*". Her words (once again) resonate with me. This thesis has been written from research that has been *mobile* and based at *multiple* sites and locations, both, within the two movements as well as in between them. It has also manifested in the patterns, connections, and interactions between these sites. As elaborated in the previous subsection, it is precisely because of the *movement* of this project that I have selected multiple methods. Multi-sited ethnography is a product of knowledge bases of varying intensities and qualities. Thus, as I have mentioned earlier, *mapping* the sites and temporalities of my 'fieldwork' has been a fractured and discontinuous process of messiness and discovery. The two *major* sites of research, India and Israel-Palestine, entailed different practices, diverse challenges, and varied intensities. 'Fieldwork' in India was longer but paced slower; it meandered as the days went by; language and logistics were things I did not need to worry about, but as an *insider*, I was recognizable and

women, was set up like a stall in a crafts fair/farmers' market; women sold handmade goods from jewellery to jam. In the late evenings, my interlocutors organised and attended various leisurely events in this space. These ranged from music concerts that ended up in singing and dancing, film screenings, and short plays and performances.<sup>450</sup>

Drawing on my experiences and observations at this site, I'd like to put forth five points on leisure, pleasure, and the politics of Zionist settler women.

First, following Watson and Scraton's (2013) argument for an intersectional understanding of gender and leisure, I'd like to examine age as a category that is relevant here. I argue here that Women in Green had ensured that women and girls of *all ages* could find leisure and comfort in their space for settler colonial politics. The children could be dropped off at the playpen, where the older ones monitored the younger, and workshop leaders, teachers, and facilitators took responsibility for them. Mothers and women without children retreated to the café, benches, and gardens, sipping coffee, reading, conversing, and relaxing. As Nadia elaborated,

There is some form of enjoyment for everyone here. Those who want to read or just listen to music can sit on the swings or hammocks and do that. Those who want to talk to others can easily sit and share a coffee; women can go for a walk around the hill; they can sing and dance; basically do whatever they want to in order to spend their free time.<sup>451</sup>

The younger girls from nearby settlements (and daughters of some of my interlocutors) not only *hung out* with their friends at this hill but also ran the café. On one of my initial visits to this site, three teenage girls were running the café, serving coffee, tea, and baked goods. As they wrote down the menu

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<sup>450</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, August and September 2014.

<sup>451</sup> Interview with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 18 August 2014.

measured against *local* norms of permissibility and conduct. Within India, the momentum of research varied with location and month, depending largely on my interlocutors' lives and the practical concerns related to travel. Research in Israel-Palestine was restricted due to the policing of borders, movement, and visa restrictions. I was given a *short-stay, single-entry* visa and told that I could not bargain for more. While *physical* space was vastly more limited than in India, the intensity of research, the passing of weeks, and the fracturing of the compactness of the Southern West Bank by the architecture of settler colonialism, rendered 'fieldwork' in Israel-Palestine a lot more stressful and hurried. Threads of emotion, of anger, of frustration, of grief ran through these multiple sites, crossing oceans and borders with no difficulty.

#### 'Unease' as a Companion

As 'fieldwork' for this thesis unfolded, I realized that "something very unsettling was accompanying the much-needed" through this research process (Eriksson Baaz & Stern, 2016:137). This unease stemmed from the politics and violence of my right-wing nationalist and settler colonial interlocutors and my positionality as a *left-wing* feminist academic and activist. I had to explore what unsettled me, and I "pursued several simultaneous lines of inquiry, reflections, designating unease as a methodological inroad and compass" (ibid.). I interrogated the varied textures, shapes, and formations of unease, reflecting on how I felt *every single day*, noting down and sharing my anger, guilt, and shame, and sketching the shifts and movements of my discomfort. I asked the questions Eriksson Baaz and Stern (2016:150) raised during their research: "*How can we empathize with perpetrators? How can we cooperate with the perpetrator empathetically?*" I added my own questions: *How could I witness and examine the violence unleashed by my interlocutors when I also fight for justice for their victims? How could I reconcile my*

for the day on a whiteboard and tidied up the space, they elaborated that they volunteered at the outpost-settlement as they could simultaneously do three things—get involved in Women in Green and its activities, do something good for their community, and get some time to spend with their friends.<sup>452</sup> On subsequent visits, I noticed how they and their friends often lounged around the outpost-settlement, talking, listening to music, smoking cigarettes, and sharing laughs.<sup>453</sup>

Second, through practices of leisure and pleasure, various formations and cliques were formed at this site and within Zionist settler women's communities. There were the older women who had been in *Judea* and *Samaria* for decades; they sat next to each other and went on short walks, discussing their grandchildren and the Israel they knew from their youth. There were the newly arrived older women, who juggled between *making* a new *home* and exuding the assuredness and self-confidence of religious wisdom and experience. There were the younger mothers, immaculately dressed, who shared tips on parenting and found solace in this community as they negotiated motherhood, marriage, and family. There were large groups of friends who lived in the same settlement, sharing gossip and localised news. There were friends, sisters, cousins, aunts and nieces, and other relatives scattered around the West Bank who used this site to connect and meet. There were even formations of groups of women based on *original* nationalities; the Americans found other Americans, the Canadians hung out with other Canadians etc. Women spoke about the news from their *old homes*, discussing politics, the food they missed, and even weather in the places they had left behind. These *little groups* were not absolute; as women inhabited multiple worlds, their leisurely spaces of friendship overlapped and the

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<sup>452</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 8 August 2014.

<sup>453</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 18 August 2014.

*'usual' world with the days spent in the 'field?' Was my presence as a researcher signalling that I condoned my interlocutors' violence?*

I floundered. I wept. I screamed. I felt ashamed. I made mistakes. I felt guilty. I felt complicit. But I also learned, listened, and reflected; I realized that sharing these apprehensions and feelings with my colleagues and fellow feminist friends, mentors, supervisors, and researchers by *reaching out* to them was not only a means of survival but also a means of facing the ethics of this project and the larger inquiries about researching those who we *disagree* with. Unease, in many ways, thus “became the most palpable and fruitful methodological tool” I had (Eriksson Baaz & Stern, 2016:137). Through this unease, I not only interrogated the intricacies of violence and my interlocutors’ politics, but also queried *how little I knew about the/their world*. Unease allowed me question dominant narratives, all-encompassing stories, and the limits of feminist frameworks and solidarities. *Where do we fit these women in? Why and how do I fit in where I do?* It allowed me to linger in my distress and reflect on my emotional and affective responses to right-wing women as well as interrogate the boundaries I had constructed between *them and myself* before I even encountered them in the ‘field’. Unease made me feel an “acute sense of estrangement” with my researcher and activist self (Eriksson Baaz & Stern, 2016:137). However, it also compelled me to ask, *what did these feelings reveal about me, my world-view, my community, and about “the feminist success stories” we take “as our point of departure?”* (ibid.) Unease demonstrated how I was complicit in reproducing power hierarchies and the limits and violences of my own feminist framings. It allowed me to embrace failure and messiness, guiding the nuances of the ‘fieldwork’ and the writing of these narratives. Unease has been my constant companion through these years, rendering me grateful for its company as well as longing for solitude.

power relations that produced (and were produced from) their subjectivities did not take linear forms. While the leading ladies of Women in Green held the most obvious power that commanded a great degree of respect and intimidation, power re-organised itself through different days, events, groups, and intersectional positionalities.<sup>454</sup>

Third, while leisure facilitated comfort, relaxation, and joy, this site also strengthened friendships, provided happiness and pleasure, and even became a place for business. Women found themselves comfortable between liveliness and laidback silences. Fun, humour, gossip, chats, serious conversations, amusement, games, and mundane socialization intersected with the aforementioned groupings and power dynamics, nurturing friendships (Green, 1998). Women came to the site to be able to *get away* from their children while staying in close proximity of them; non-familial leisure and the watchful domestic eye existed side by side. Women sat in the sun, sang, played instruments, and danced, engaging in an affective display of conviviality. Women also sold settlement wine, jewellery, and other handicrafts with their friends and colleagues transforming into their customers and shopping and consumerism (however limited) provided a site for gendered leisure (Aitchison, 1999).<sup>455</sup>

Fourth, it is very significant to note that the outpost-settlement of Givat Oz V’Gaon, with its opportunities for leisure and pleasure, was not an anomaly. Settlements in *Judea* and *Samaria* and other outposts were also designed to nurture intimacy, friendship, and community through sites of leisure. As I have elaborated in the previous section on friendship, settlements were designed in ways that nurtured intimacy and placed families close to one

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<sup>454</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, August and September 2014.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

## 2.4 The Reflexivity of Discomfort

Through the previous section on methodology and methods, I have already raised numerous questions on the ethics of research and ‘fieldwork’. In this section, I examine these questions further, dissecting the intricacies of discomfort as a means of reflexivity.

### Responsibilities towards my Interlocutors

I gained informed consent from all my interlocutors before any exchanges that have found place in this thesis. While I did not explicitly elaborate on my political positions in our conversations, my interlocutors were aware of my name, credentials, affiliations, the purpose of my *intrusion*, the nature of my research project, and the expected modes of output. Whenever requested by them, I have anonymised their names and disguised any identifiable markers. I have made an ethical effort to not edit their narratives in ways that obfuscate and alter their original meaning and intention. I have also constantly asked myself a question that Wibben (2016:30) poses – *Whose aims and interests is this research serving?* I have taken the help of friends and colleagues who have looked over my fieldnotes and writing, highlighting the patterns and nuances of my biases.

### Access, Safety, and Performance

The first challenge to the ‘fieldwork’ in this research project was that of *access*. Right-wing movements are tight-knit communities that are wary of *outsiders* such as journalists and researchers. *Access*, even when granted runs the risk of being *superficial*; with the *outsider* being narrated *scripted* comments. Interestingly, while I was prepared for a struggle vis-à-vis access, right-wing women in both movements were very welcoming and willing to engage with

another (Weizman, 2012). Similarly, settlements were also constructed with the communities’ leisure in mind; they included cafés and elaborate common spaces, playgrounds and sand-pits for children, parks and gardens lined with flowers and trees, community halls, gathering spaces, and synagogues, markets and shops, women’s salons and spas, men’s meeting spaces, and facilities for sports, music, and games. This design not only provided avenues for leisure and pleasure (for men, women, children, and families) that in turn furthered intimacy but also was an assertion of the settlers’ right to be in *this land*. With its greenery, villa-style buildings, and leisure facilities<sup>456</sup> the settlement was a relaxing resort that demarcated itself from *arid* and *dreary Arab land* (Weizman, 2012).

Fifth and final, *all* these practices and sites of leisure and pleasure enabled and were enabled by *everyday* politics. To elaborate, as mentioned earlier, leisure and pleasure furthered friendships and intimacy, bringing this community of settler colonial women closer and connecting them through threads of camaraderie that were interwoven with their politics. Women who attended activities and events by Women in Green simultaneously engaged in practices of leisure and pleasure. This allowed the leaders of the organization to shape the subjectivities of their members and attendees; one could have fun and joy *alongside* being engaged in politics; one did not have to choose between the two as each facilitated the other. Furthermore, by arranging for activities for children, Women in Green also allowed its members to not have to choose between family, leisure, and politics; they could be mothers, friends, *and* political agents at the outpost-settlement. By providing *something for everyone*, all kinds of women were made to feel welcome at the site. By *marketing* the space as a nature park/garden/forest/camping site, Zionist settler women

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<sup>456</sup> That are all made possible through the occupation and theft of water resources of the Palestinians (Weizman, 2012).

me. Initial scepticisms, wherever present, softened over time. I contacted my interlocutors before I arrived in their *locations* through email and social media; I got in touch with them as soon I arrived in the 'field' and as I mentioned earlier, I *showed up* and *followed up* with regularity, being completely honest about my status as a PhD researcher and my resolve to *listen to* and *witness* their everyday politics and narratives.

However, although I had *meaningful access*, there remained a few issues of safety. In India, Hindu right-wing women routinely participated in charged situations that resulted in violence and clashes. Present at many of acts of violence, I had to constantly negotiate my boundaries and decide *when to stay* and *when to leave*. I also had to be careful (and secretive) about the *location* of my residence and my parents' home as a safety mechanism. In Israel-Palestine, safety issues were paramount as I was policed and interrupted by various oppressive mechanisms of the Israeli state as well as the settlers themselves. I was detained at the airport, stopped at checkpoints, and I had to *officially* enrol as a student at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in order to stay in the country. While this went against my support of the BDS movement, I had no choice but to show up regularly at the university and *confirm* my presence in Jerusalem. The communities of my interlocutors often viewed me with mistrust and I had to identify myself as the *Indian researcher* before I entered their *sites* let alone their narrations. I kept my supervisors, family, and close friends informed of my whereabouts and also *performed my positionality, dressing Indian, looking Indian, and performing the part of a brown Hindu outsider woman* regularly. I understand that these performances fall into ethical grey areas, but they became the means to conduct 'fieldwork' and stay safe.

activists also encouraged those not affiliated with their political events (and friends and family of those affiliated) to visit the site and *make themselves at home*. Some of the women who arrived at the site without any previous involvement with Women in Green witnessed several events at the site and were soon interested and even involved in the organisation; through leisure and pleasure, new members had been found. By moving their main events (from educational sessions to charity drives to violent protests) and even their business, organizational, and planning meetings to the outpost-settlement and by shaping it as a meeting/assembly point and a space where the leaders of Women in Green could *always* be found and approached, Zionist settler women made this site of joy central to their *everyday* politics. This in turn necessitated more avenues, investments, and infrastructures for leisure and pleasure. Through the *public visibility* of this space (the hoardings, road signs, sounds etc.) and the leisurely politics it contained, my interlocutors also asserted, time and again, that they had a *right* to be in this land, to live their lives in this land, and to feel happiness, joy, and comfort in this land.

I understood this final point with much more clarity on an afternoon in September 2014. As we wrapped up an educational session, my interlocutor Tamar rushed to the parking at Givat Oz V'Gaon. Her young daughter, her daughter's friends, and her husband had arrived. They were going to celebrate her daughter's seventh birthday at the outpost-settlement. The canopy had been decorated with balloons and streamers; a table full of snacks and drinks had been set up. Tamar left her family and her daughter's friends at the canopy and ran into the café; she came out with a large cake depicting the popular character of Princess Elsa from the popular movie Frozen (2013). She lit the candles and everyone sang *happy birthday*; the cake was cut and served along with snacks and beverages; games were organised and played and the children had fun running around; the women (Tamar and her friends



### Insider/Outsider; Insider-Outsider

Wibben (2016:27) asserts that feminist methodologies and ethics entail questioning “how doing research might require negotiating one’s position as an outsider, insider, or both”. As a Hindu who is an Indian passport holder, studying and living in the UK, I occupied multiple subject positions in both my field sites. In India, I oscillated between being seen as *an insider* who fit into neat categories of religion, caste, and class and *an outsider*, studying in a foreign university and living away from her *homeland*. I was fluent in the languages of research, I had *grown up* in the cities of my ‘fieldwork’, and I understood the nuances of daily life. However, I was also *assumed* to be aloof and ignorant of Indian politics at times and my interlocutors often *wanted* to *educate* me. My fluid insider-outsider status rendered more conversations for sure, but it also made me wonder: *what was I missing? What was being obfuscated by my class and caste positions? How did the depth of my involvement in activism in India influence my research and writing?* In Israel-Palestine, Zionist settler women viewed me as a *friendly outsider*; my position as a *Hindu woman from India* occluded any conflict regarding my intentions and classified me as a *non-Arab who looks like an Arab*. While I was labelled as one *outside* of the social orders of daily life, my *outsider* status also made it easier for my interlocutors to share their narratives with me without fears of judgment and gossip. My ‘fieldwork’ was thus enriched yet surrounded by concerns that I was *missing the intricacies of life* as an *outsider* and *visitor*.

Occupying these fluid insider-outsider positions during my ‘fieldwork’ enabled me to tap into various segments of my interlocutors’ lives, worlds, and perspectives. It allowed me to occupy numerous positions of power and entailed negotiating each of these, time and again. As I sit here and reflect on the process of ‘fieldwork’, I realize that I was *hearing* and *witnessing* everyday

from Women in Green) sat back, ate, drank wine, and talked.<sup>457</sup> Tamar handed me a piece of cake and said with a smile,

We must make moments of happiness in these *newly re-claimed* lands.  
We fought to get them back and must let our laughter be heard. We must sit back and enjoy them. Take a moment from our day to look at their beauty and smile!<sup>458</sup>

### Leisure, Pleasure, and the Politics of Hindu Right-Wing Women

For Zionist settler women in the Southern West Bank, spatial and social organisation necessitated that the sites of leisure and pleasure (and the practices they contained/entailed) remained *bound* and *concentrated*. The settlements, outpost-settlements such as Givat Oz V’Gaon, military outposts like Shdema, and occasional work-related trips to the *rest of Israel* emerged as the key (if not the *only*) sites to examine leisure. Furthermore, there was only *one* organisation that brought my interlocutors together, making it *simpler* to examine networks of intimacy and politics. For the widespread and dispersed Hindu right-wing project, women’s leisure and intimacy were scattered along geographies, locations, and spatialities. My interlocutors in different cities did not *all* know each other and definitely did not *all* live in the same short radius of community. Within neighbourhoods, bonds of community and friendship were strong, but not *concentrated* through an architecture of intimacy like in the case of Zionist settler women. Thus, to disentangle threads of leisure and pleasure from these sprinkled sites, in this subsection, I organise my analyses into four main points/locations; these are: the *local*, the camp, the travel, and the public.<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>457</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 15 September 2014.

<sup>458</sup> Conversation with Tamar, Givat Oz V’Gaon, 15 September 2014.

<sup>459</sup> Before I begin, I must reassert that this is not an exhaustive analysis of the leisure and pleasure of six million (officially registered) Hindu right-wing women; it remains vastly limited due to logistical and geographical reasons.

politics through layers of identifications, multiple subjectivities, and plural narratives, not the least of which were my own complicated feelings.

### Silence, Friendship, and Leaving the 'Field'

While my intention with this research project has never been to “condone violence or to discuss its merits” and has focused on highlighting how violence has the “potential to transform people’s everyday lives”, I often found myself in confusing and emotionally complex situations. In February 2014, when I was conducting research in Delhi, the Hindu right-wing enforced a ban on a book on Hinduism by the scholar Wendy Doniger. At the annual book fair in New Delhi, my interlocutors stood outside the entrance, screaming in anger at Doniger’s writing and burning copies of her books. I stood by them, taking notes, *observing* but also *participating*, however minimally. On the other side of the entrance, stood my activist and academic friends, staging a protest where they read aloud from banned books. My research had made me choose a *side* that afternoon, like many other afternoons; it had added yet another layer to my multiple lives during ‘fieldwork’.

Furthermore, although at many moments during my ‘fieldwork’ I felt silenced by my research and surrounded by anger, fear, sadness, and guilt, putting on a *poker* face, I also felt genuinely confounded by my relationships with my interlocutors. I had *many* moments of friendship, sharing, empathy, joy, and dialogue with right-wing women; we dined at restaurants, we sipped coffee in cafés, we smoked cigarettes, we laughed, we walked, and we sat in gardens and parks; we spoke about life, love, and marriage; and we shared *like friends do*. Before I went to the ‘field’ I worried about the lack of empathy I would feel for my interlocutors; ‘fieldwork’ sprung a surprise and new questions emerged. *How do I deal with these friendships and the empathy and dialogue I*

The first point of examining practices of leisure of Hindu right-wing women is the *local*, i.e. the events/meetings organised by the *shakhas* (branches) of *Durga Vahini* and the *Samiti* in different neighbourhoods. As highlighted in the introductory *Chapter One*, these regular gatherings (held weekly if not more often) intertwined political sessions (from pedagogical discussions to planning charitable events) with practices of leisure such as drinking tea, relaxing, catching-up with friends and neighbours, and socializing.<sup>460</sup> They were usually held at the designated office of the chapter of the organisation, in the home of a leader/senior member of the chapter, or in a public space such as a garden, park, café, mall etc. Women used these planned *intervals* in their usual domesticities to *get away* from family and find comfort in their connective community networks and *ordinary* practices of leisure and pleasure. Although these practices, such as drinking tea, were quotidian for my interlocutors (carried out in their homes and a variety of other settings), the warmth of friends and the *escape* from familial life rendered them leisurely activities.<sup>461</sup> Leaders and organisers, therefore, *always* ensured that their political events (of all kinds) created some room and time for leisure and pleasure, shaping the subjectivities of both, women who came to these sessions for the politics (and enjoyed leisure as an add-on) and women who came to these sessions for leisure and friendship (and involved themselves in the politics eventually).<sup>462</sup>

Furthermore, both the *Durga Vahini* and the *Samiti* also organise events that are entirely for leisure and pleasure. These include morning yoga sessions, meditation groups, collective singing of devotional songs, storytelling, walks in the park etc. This set of events not only invigorates the mind and the body

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<sup>460</sup> See *Chapter One*, p.14

<sup>461</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 17 April 2014.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

*embarked on? What does leaving the field and ending this project entail? Was there space for my interlocutors in my life beyond this thesis?* These questions remain unanswered for now even as they linger close.

### **Researching Right-Wing Women: Embracing the Reflexivity of Discomfort**

Cohn (2016) has asserted that conducting field research involves suspending your systems of belief *and* disbelief to understand the worldview of your interlocutors. ‘Fieldwork’ also involves momentarily centring intellectual curiosity and inhabiting the identity of the researched, while placing political, ontological, epistemological values and preconceptions aside (Jacoby, 2006). However, with the vast differences in the political leanings of my interlocutors and myself and the violent cultural nationalist and settler colonial politics right-wing women espouse, I find these words by Cohn and Jacoby insufficient.

I, therefore, turn to the work of Hamdan (2009) who emphasizes that feminist researchers need to practice reflexivity that goes beyond the known and embraces the push towards an unfamiliar and uncomfortable subject. Reflexivity is not simply a story of methods, methodologies, challenges, ethics and of “subjects, subjectivities, nor should it entail self-indulgence” (Hamdan, 2009:381). Tracing reflexivity as discomfort compels the researcher to examine a “positioning of reflexivity not as clarity, honesty, or humility, but as practice of confounding disruptions” (Pillow, 2003:192). The reflexivity of discomfort does not seek *solutions* and *linearity*. It embraces messy examples – “examples that may not always be successful, examples that do not seek a comfortable, transcendent end-point but leave us in the uncomfortable realities of doing engaged qualitative research” (Hamdan, 2009:382) As I end this brief chapter, I embrace the reflexivity of discomfort as a means of interrogation, of methodology, of negotiation, of revelations, of identifying vulnerabilities, of

of the Hindu woman but also nurtures their neighbourly intimacies.<sup>463</sup> These regular neighbourhood events appeal to different age groups and are also *localised* and tailored to suit the needs of the attendees. For instance, yoga sessions are set at a level of difficulty that is agreeable to most members; local languages are used in different sessions across India; and sessions might incorporate current trends like mindfulness, organic food and gardening, and Bollywood dance lessons.<sup>464</sup>

The second point of interrogation here are the training camps by *Durga Vahini* and the *Samiti*. These camps are held twice a year in various towns, cities, and districts, and annually in broader regions (like the Konkan). For the organisers and leaders (like my interlocutor Veena), these camps are a lot of work. However, they also provide opportunities for leisure and pleasure for my interlocutors in a few ways. Women work together for months, incorporating time for relaxation group outings, meals, tea breaks, visits to restaurants, malls, and shops, picnics, and even team-building events that centred on leisure and pleasure. Women undertake numerous trips (local and beyond) to organise things, finding moments of comfort and intimacy along the way. At the camp I attended, although things were hectic and my interlocutors ran around managing hundreds of attendees, they found stolen moments of friendship, laughter, fun, and relaxation.<sup>465</sup>

Furthermore, Menon (2010:131-156) elaborates on the “fun” and “games” that surround the “deadly politics” of Hindutva at a camp organised by the *Samiti*. Every morning the girls at the camp are engaged in a session of yoga; in the evenings an entertainment hour is organised where attendees sing

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<sup>463</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 21 April 2014.

<sup>464</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 2 July 2014.

<sup>465</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 10 and 11 May 2014.

intrigue, of ethical pondering, of creation, of hope, and of unease; as clichéd as this might sound, I find comfort in the discomfort of this research project and thesis.

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In this short chapter, I have elaborated on the *practice* of doing ‘fieldwork’ and the many layers of the research process. I have provided a timeline of my research; I have discussed the intricacies of my methodologies and methods; and I have enumerated on the challenges and ethical concerns this project has entailed. Moving between feminist literature on ethics and methods and my personal-political reflections from the field, I have unpacked how a methodology of unease and a reflexivity of discomfort have guided the process of researching right-wing women and narrating their narratives. As I now delve into my substantive and ethnographic chapters, I remind myself of these crucial words by Jacoby (2006:158),

Studying the very problematic and controversial “other” cannot be merely textual. It is precisely during the time spent “in the trenches,” so to speak, that researchers must inevitably dirty their hands and face political, methodological and epistemological dilemmas. Otherwise, there is no trace of proper tools for ethical conduct or critical introspection while navigating the intricate shoals of fieldwork and reflecting back upon those tools in the post-fieldwork phase.

(Bollywood, devotional, and nationalist) songs, play group games, talk and gossip, and relax and enjoy together; Games during the day, although fun, were also very aggressive and tiring (ibid.). During my time at the camp organised by the *Durga Vahini* in Kalyan, India, I noticed the same format of activities. As most of the attendees were young, these leisure activities were planned accordingly; they were trendy, they drew on popular culture, they furthered a group *spirit*, and they were fast-paced and active. The young girls nurtured old friendships and fostered new ones through the fun and the games; laughter accompanied their leisure, pleasure, and violence and exclusionary politics.<sup>466</sup> My interlocutors from *Durga Vahini* had not only ensured that leisure intermingled with their own political activities but also constituted the young attendees of the camp as subjects who were political and aggressive and simultaneously pleased and relaxed. The fun and intimacy drew in more participants, strengthening the right-wing cause; the politics transformed itself to become *more* fun.

The third point of examination of leisure and pleasure of Hindu right-wing women is the travel to the plethora of bigger events, conferences, and meetings for those interlocutors who were *leaders* and were very active in the movement. Like in the narrative that introduced this section, women from across the country travelled to attend larger Hindu right-wing events. These events encompassed pedagogical sessions, violent mobilisations and protests, as well as broader planning, budgeting, and organizational meetings. Time and space for leisure and pleasure were always carved into the agenda; women also found comfort and happiness in *mundane* aspects of these trips, such as sleep, long conversations, train travel, and time away from their families and homes. Interestingly, trips like these, while enjoyable for my

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<sup>466</sup> Fieldnotes, Kalyan, India, 9 May 2014.

### 3

#### Teaching Hindutva and Zionism: Pedagogical Practices and/of Right-Wing Women

##### 3.1 Introduction: Pedagogy as Everyday Politics

An hour after the end of Sabbath on a Saturday evening, Sarah Nachson, my host for the weekend, came up to me hurriedly and asked for my help. A group of approximately forty teenaged girls was about to arrive at her home and she was to speak to them. Sarah, one of the earliest settlers in *Kiryat Arba*, was revered throughout the community for her political history and activism. She was also known to be the grandmother of ninety-six children and the great grandmother of twelve (many of whom I met during my time with her). She said she was proud of two things in her life—her commitment to the Zionist cause in Hebron and the surrounding areas and her ability to remember all the names and birthdays of her grandchildren and their children.<sup>35</sup> In 1979, Sarah and a handful of other women laid claim to the *Beit Haddasah* building in Hebron.<sup>36</sup> They moved into the building against the wishes of the IDF (and the Palestinians in the area) with their children, setting up temporary kitchens and homes. For a year they lived in the dilapidated building, struggling, as she said, to survive without heating, proper ventilation, food and electricity. Their *struggle* paid off as after a year of this occupation, the IDF allowed them to *settle* the building and the surrounding area.<sup>37</sup> The *Beit Haddasah* families became the first settlers of Hebron and the women became the admired matriarchs of the settler movement in the area.

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<sup>35</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 30 August 2014.

<sup>36</sup> The structure was called the Dabouya building and was a large complex in the center of Hebron that was previously used as a clinic. After taking it over, Sarah and the other occupiers renamed it Beit Hadassah.

<sup>37</sup> Fieldnotes, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 29 August 2014 and Jerusalem, Palestine, 30 August 2014.

interlocutors, also *transformed* them from homemakers and local right-wing workers to highflying business leaders; travel, with all its leisure, legitimised their work and its importance.<sup>467</sup> As Pranoti elaborated,

My husband is always traveling for work. Sometimes to Delhi, other times to Bangalore. He also went to Singapore once. I never go anywhere by myself—we take holidays with the family but we *all* go and it is usually nearby someplace. This time I had to go for my work—all the way to Delhi! I had to really organise everything with the kids and the house, but I did it. He [the husband] knows this is very important for me. All kinds of important ladies will be coming here. I had to pack carefully, bring my best things, and I felt so good and important. It was like my family respected me much more. I was going away on a holiday in one way but also for work in another.<sup>468</sup>

The fourth and final point of examination in this section is the *public* nature and *visibility* of Hindu right-wing women's leisure and pleasure. While women often asserted that leisure, friendship, and intimacy and the forms that they entailed (for example: yoga, meditation, drinking tea) were *private matters*, these practices were often carried out in *public visibility* in neighbourhoods, streets, parks, gardens, malls, cafés, public transport, religious sites, and entire sections of the city.<sup>469</sup> Songs were sung boisterously with accompanying instruments; prayers and slogans were chanted alongside yoga; religious iconography and materiality accompanied my interlocutors as they navigated their streets; their laughter and games echoed through the city.<sup>470</sup> This *visibility* was a means of claiming and marking public space and asserting that Hindu leisure and laughter was a right and it was roaring and

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<sup>467</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 22 November 2014.

<sup>468</sup> Conversation with Pranoti, New Delhi, India, 22 November 2014.

<sup>469</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 2 July 2014.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid.

Now, more than thirty years later, a group of young girls from all over Israel who had been spending Sabbath in Kiryat Arba, learning about the *struggles* of the settlers, were to be lectured by Sarah. She was to tell them her story, intertwining the personal and the political, reminding the girls of their history, their role, and their place in the Zionist struggle for *Judea* and *Samaria*.

As I moved chairs around to *create* a classroom in her beautiful living room, Rabbi Nachson, her husband, called out for me. Leaving the living room that was adorned with paintings by the Rabbi (a Hasidic artist), I went into his study. The Rabbi was sitting at his desk, surrounded by books—new and old, thousands of clippings of newspaper cartoons, and his prized collection of tobacco pipes. Next to him was a younger man dressed in a white robe, holding a set of pins and needles. The Rabbi quickly explained that this man was going to try an acupuncture-like treatment (“from Japan”) that was to help with the Rabbi’s diabetes. He wanted me to be around for comfort as it was going to be painful. He also thought as an “eastern woman”, I might be interested in this “new medicine”.<sup>38</sup> As I stood watching the Rabbi wince in pain with every needle, I heard the girls arrive in the living room. A few minutes of noise and shuffling outside, punctuated by the Rabbi’s sharp cries in my immediate surroundings, and I heard Sarah’s voice, speaking Hebrew, firm and audible. I left the study and went outside to listen to Sarah, glancing at the teenagers, all holding pens and notepads, ready to write. She spoke with emotion and poise.<sup>39</sup>

In 1975, Sarah’s then youngest baby died of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). “*The doctors told me it just happens to some babies. There are no reasons for it, just pain and grief for the mother*”, she had told me in a previous

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<sup>38</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 30 August 2014.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

emphatic in an increasingly *anti-national* and *anti-Hindu* nation. This visibility of leisure, pleasure, and politics also blurred the boundaries between the personal and the political, the private and the public, and the home and the world.

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In this section, I have unpacked the practices and sites of leisure and pleasure of right-wing women. I have argued that leisure enabled and was enabled by right-wing politics and must be understood through an intersectional lens. Leisure and pleasure fostered bonds of friendship, intimacy, and community amongst my interlocutors, strengthening their exclusionary and violent politics and making their work *visible* and joyous. Before I move on to the next section, I’d like to offer two final arguments that bring this section together.

First, in her work on the politics of pleasure of Palestinian women from refugee camps who promenaded on the Beirut seaside cornice and visited women-only beaches, Khalili (2015:595) asserts that,

When the young woman breaks out, when she speaks in a loud Palestinian accent in a public space of leisure, when she declares herself at a beach or on the Corniche, she is making visible not just a Palestinian in a Lebanese space but a Palestinian *woman* in a Lebanese *public* space. This may or may not be an act of resistance; but it is a recuperation of a sense of wonder at the world, and a demand to physically inhabit it. It is a claim to the city, and a demand to replace the alienating and monadic discipline of work with the ephemeral conviviality of being in public, and the sense, however transitory and superficial of a life in common.

While Khalili (2015:596) is elaborating on the displaced refugee woman subverting her conditions and designations through “spaces for ephemeral, transitory moments of happiness in the temporal crush of suffering and

conversation.<sup>40</sup> Sarah decided that she wanted to bury her baby in the Jewish Cemetery in Hebron that had been closed to Jewish burials since 1929. As she narrated her story to these young girls, one that she had previously told me, I listened quietly. She said,

I picked up my dead baby boy and wrapped him in a white sheet. I got into the car. I was devastated but the tears would not come. All I wanted was that my baby should be buried where he belonged. We were about one kilometre from the cemetery when the IDF stopped us and asked us to not create any trouble. I stood there, silently, and then started to walk. I told the soldiers that I was going to bury my baby in that land, my land, whether they let me or not. I told them to shoot me if they wanted, but I will lay my son into the holy soil. And then I continued to walk with the baby in my arms. The soldiers began to weep and called their superiors and said they could not stop me, and why should they? As I reached the end of the hill, they came running after me, offering to take me to the cemetery in their vehicles. I finally reached the cemetery, found a spot near a beautiful olive tree, and buried my son. Finally I could weep.<sup>41</sup>

There was silence as she spoke. Sarah told the girls that her actions as a mother who grieved for her baby translated into a very powerful political act. She was a mother, yes, but she was also a Jew, she was also a Zionist, and she was also one who belonged to Hebron and wanted to live there and be buried there.<sup>42</sup>

As she continued to *educate* the young girls (who actively took notes, articulating their learning through the occasional nod, gasp, and smile) on the

trauma”, I argue that facets of Khalili’s argument can be (tragically) extended to right-wing women as well. Through the *public visibility* of their leisurely bodies, emotions, and politics, right-wing women resisted and subverted (some) norms of gender and propriety within their communities, negotiated nationalist and settler-colonial boundaries of private/public, marked themselves as the occupiers of Palestinian/Indian land, demanded to physically inhabit *their* usurped territories, and replaced the “monadic discipline of work with the ephemeral conviviality of being in public” and being together (Khalili, 2015:595). However, unlike Khalili’s Palestinian interlocutors whose pleasures were “ripples” in the political lives of the city, right-wing women’s leisures and pleasures (sadly) created and deepened a violent politics that was only strengthening *every day*.

Second, in their book *Leisurely Islam*, Deeb and Harb (2013) elaborate on the intersections between leisure, morality, and piety in Shi’ite South Beirut. They argue that “choices about leisure activities and places are informed by different moral rubrics, as people negotiate social norms, religious tenets, and political layouts” (Deeb & Harb, 2013:208). In this section, I have already elaborated on how political layouts inform leisurely practices. Now, I would also like to assert that norms of morality and goodness, piety, and religion also influence leisure and pleasure of right-wing women.

To elaborate, the kinds of leisure activities that were organised *and* permitted in both, Hindu right-wing and Zionist settler women’s communities, had to adhere to conceptualizations of morality, goodness, and piety in the community. For instance, while younger girls in Women in Green smoked, mothers rarely did so, and while mothers had an occasional glass of wine,

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<sup>40</sup> Conversation with Sarah Nachson, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 29 August 2014.

<sup>41</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 30 August 2014.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

history of the Hebron settler movement, I heard the Rabbi exit his study. Sarah was just beginning to tell the story of how she was the first woman who had her son circumcised at the contested site of the Ibrahimi Mosque and the *Me'arat ha-Makhpela* (Cave of the Patriarchs). A significantly holy site in Judaism, the Mosque/Cave in Hebron was closed to Jewish worshippers at the time except on Jewish holidays.<sup>43</sup> Ceremonial rites that involved alcohol (such as the *brit milah* or circumcision) had not been held there for centuries. As Sarah elaborated on how she fought against the IDF to have her fourth son circumcised at this holy site, the Rabbi walked up to her. Ignoring her audience of forty eager girls and stopping her mid-sentence, he tapped her on the shoulder and put up his hand in front of her face. He wanted her (and the room) to see the five long needles, still embedded in his palm, looking gory and painful. She paused, clearly shocked by this interruption, but looked up to him, smiled, and then continued speaking, ignoring him and his needle-filled hand. The young girls giggled and I shifted uncomfortably, embarrassed for her and the Rabbi.<sup>44</sup>

An hour later she was done speaking about her life and political activism and the girls began to ask questions. As the questions dwindled, I said my goodbyes to the Nachsons as I was heading back to Jerusalem for the next few days. On the two hour journey to my flat, I continued to dwell not only on Sarah's pedagogical narratives and techniques, but also on her husband's

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<sup>43</sup> After the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel gained control of Hebron and Rabbi Shlomo Goren; the Chief Rabbi of the IDF, claimed that he became the first Jew to enter the space in 700 years. As a mosque lay at the site, Israel implemented a plan of "sharing" the premises with Jewish worshippers being allowed into the site for special occasions and festivals. In 1968, Jewish worshippers were allowed to hold *Rosh Hashanah* (Jewish New Year) services inside the site. As the mosque/Cave became a site of violence, it was again closed to Jewish worshippers (and Muslim worshippers were closely monitored) for the next few years and is now "shared".

<sup>44</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 30 August 2014.

older women never did.<sup>471</sup> Clothing, styles of music and dancing, the items bought and sold at the outpost-settlement, the decibel levels of one's laughter, the types of books read and jokes cracked, *all* followed rules of respectability, frugality, and modesty.<sup>472</sup> Similarly, while younger girls and women in the Hindu right-wing dressed in (limited) 'Western' wear, laughed and danced with vigour, and ran around the camps and streets, older/married women conducted themselves with *dignity* and *poise*; while yoga and meditation were permissible, they had to be carried out in *modest* clothing; while Bollywood music was introduced, it could not contain lyrics that were deemed obscene; while certain cafés and malls could be meeting spots, pubs and bars could certainly not; and while women could travel to events together, they had to ensure that they dressed respectfully and did not associate with any men on these trips.<sup>473</sup> Discourses on morality shaped the practices of leisure and pleasure; these practices in turn re-enforced norms of morality and goodness.

Furthermore, it is crucial to mention that piety and religion not only influenced morality and goodness but were also sites of leisure and pleasure. To elaborate, several sites and practices of leisure and intimacy among right-wing women were closely interlinked with religion. For instance, Zionist settler women gathered together on Sabbath evenings in Sarah Nachson's massive kitchen. They prayed together; their prayers interspersed with greetings, catch-ups, laughter, gossip, and the relaxation that came with finishing the chores for the weekend. Women camped at Givat Oz V'Gaon on Sabbath evenings (and even for religious holidays) and religious rituals mingled with leisure and politics. Hindu right-wing sang devotional songs together, narrated stories from mythology, attended and organised mammoth

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<sup>471</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, September 28, 2014.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid.

<sup>473</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 10 July 2014.



rude intrusion into her carefully crafted space and her swift and dismissive response to this incursion.<sup>45</sup>

In her pivotal work on gender and nationalism, Yuval-Davis (1997:116) argues that women “are not just biological reproducers of the nation, but also its cultural reproducers, often being given the task of guardians of ‘culture’ who are responsible for transmitting it to the children”. Enloe (1989:44) also argues that gender and women remain crucial to projects of nationalism as disseminators of “masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope”. Yuval-Davis and Enloe’s arguments can be extended to the vast body of colonial and settler colonial studies that have long argued that colonial rule and settlement comes “into being by mobilising gendered and sexual power” (Morgensen, 2012:5). McClintock (1991:110) elaborating on the role of women in Afrikaner settler colonialism in South Africa asserts that women not only played a very crucial symbolic role in the invention and establishment of *Afrikanerdom* but also in its spread, “complicit in the exercise and legitimation of white domination”.

The arguments of the abovementioned scholars and founding texts of the right-wing movements in discussion in this thesis indicate that in dominant and often male-formulated discourses of the right-wing, women, the maternal and nurturing symbolic and biological reproducers and boundary-keepers of the nation, are depicted as the ‘natural’ imparters and transmitters of nationalist and settler colonial ‘culture’—knowledge, values, difference, and education (Yuval-Davis, 1997). In their capacity as mothers and the earliest (and most prominent) ‘teachers’ that children of the right-wing encounter, they are not mere reproducers but are a treasure trove of *appropriate* moral

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

celebrations of religious festivals, and even held prayer ceremonies that lasted the entire night and brought together women from the community. Religion was a site for both, politics as well as leisure, friendship, and intimacy.

#### 5.4 Visualizing Friendship and Leisure: A Feminist Intervention

In his study of visual cultures in South Asia, Pinney (2004:8) asks the researcher how she might write histories and politics *only* through the visual domain. In January 2016, I sat in a lecture hall at SOAS and watched a performance by the scholar and artist, Grada Kilomba. Kilomba engaged with the themes of gender, race, and migration through visual means that she argued decolonised the production of feminist knowledges. Her narratives were visual; her narration was visual; her work reminded me of Pinney’s words. Elsewhere, in a film project, she asserted,

I want to feel the words that I write, to associate them not only with theory but also with movement, sounds, memories, and emotions (Kilomba, *While I Write*, 2015).

In this section, I take Pinney’s question and Kilomba’s decolonial methods to heart. I present two series of images that encapsulate the friendships and leisure of right-wing women. These images are *visual* ethnographic narratives that capture and reassert the arguments of the last two sections and attempt to *tell stories differently* (Hemmings, 2011).

The first series is titled, *Images of Image-Making at the Hindu Women’s Conference*. It contains six images (Figures 5.1-5.6) that capture the friendships of my interlocutors by depicting the moments where they take pictures of each other at this massive conference in New Delhi, India (November 21-23,

practices (religious and otherwise), spiritual, cultural, and religious knowledge, historical, political, mythological, and familial and personal stories, legends, and narratives, and the materiality of the project (be it through clothes, food, or household objects). Additionally, as an elderly male Hindu right-wing interlocutor, Shyam Mehra mentioned, “*as a good teacher should be, they are also epitomes of a disciplining yet unconditionally loving demeanour*”.<sup>46</sup>

In both the Hindu right-wing movement and the Zionist project, women are designated to raise *sons of the soil* who will consider their duty to defend the nation—akin to their devotion and loyalty to their mothers. In both movements, dominant male discourses also dictate that women are also obliged to raise *daughters of the nation* who will hold the symbolic manifestation of ‘cultural’ values and grow up to become honourable wives and mothers of the nation. Women’s roles, thus, do not end with giving birth but extend to a constant and continuous mothering that includes and necessitates pedagogy—the theory and praxis of teaching and education.

Sarah Nachson’s narrative(s) that begins this chapter certainly exemplify the aforementioned arguments and offers the broad analytical framework for this chapter. Not only did Sarah birth seventeen children but she also raised them within the confines of the Zionist project, imparting values and teachings necessary to keep it afloat and strong. As she very proudly told me, “*all my children live in Israel, none of them left this land; most of them live in Judea and Samaria. They are committed to our cause*”.<sup>47</sup> More pertinently, her pedagogical practice extends beyond her prescribed role as mother-educator. Sarah, like many of her counterparts, has extended her pedagogy into a variety of roles,

2014). Their images (and my images of their image-making) capture moments of joy, happiness, friendship, and intimacy at this site of cultural nationalist politics.

The second series is titled, *Found Objects of Leisure at Givat Oz V’Gaon*. It contains ten images (Figures 5.7-5.16) of *things* that were scattered through the outpost-settlement and *found* at different times by this researcher. These *objects* (and my images) hold narratives of leisure, pleasure, and intimacy amongst the social and political lives of Zionist settler women.

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Shyam Mehra, New Delhi, India, 20 February 2014.

<sup>47</sup> Conversation with Sarah Nachson, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 29 August 2014.

suited to numerous audiences, and incorporating personal stories and oral histories along with mythology, activism, and mobilisation. Pedagogy, for her, was a site for politics *in* and *of* the everyday. For right-wing women, education, thus, was not always a natural, innate or prescribed quality but a self-imposed laborious and strategic effort involving planning, decision-making, and implementation of a host of pedagogical practices, performances, and narratives. Furthermore, Sarah's husband Rabbi Nachson's rude intrusion into her carefully crafted pedagogical space, her acknowledgment of this intrusion, and her dismissal of it, I argue, are symbolic of the gendered tensions in the pedagogies of the right-wing women. Right-wing women often *find* and construct narratives and voices of political agency that establish alternative 'feminine' (if not feminist) discourses of nationalist and settler colonial ideology giving supreme importance to female figures, warrior motherhood, and women-centric discourses, often disagreeing with male ideologues and members.

Under the umbrella of these broader arguments, in this chapter, I analyse how right-wing women push the boundaries of familial and maternal national duties to carefully construct themselves as subjects who are holders of a nuanced and sophisticated pedagogical practice. It is pertinent to mention that although right-wing women have made several forays into *formal* state-based education systems, this chapter focuses on *informal* spaces of pedagogy that exist *outside* of *regular* schools/universities.<sup>48</sup> Examining the construction

<sup>48</sup> For more on nationalism, colonialism, and state-education in Israel, see the following: Kestler-D'Amours (2012). "Militarising education in Israeli schools." *Al Jazeera English*. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/06/2012624854285479.html>; the film *This is My Land* by Erde, Tamara (2012), <http://www.tamaraerde.com/films/this-is-my-land/>; and the work of Ayman K. Agbaria (2016 & 2015). For more on Hindu nationalism and formal education in India, see the following: Bakaya, A. (2009). "India: RSS Schools and the Hindu Nationalist Education Project." South Asia Citizens Web. <http://www.sacw.net/article852.html>; Shrimankar, D. (2014). "Hindu nationalism and education: Why vigilance is needed under a BJP government."

#### Series One: Images of Image-Making at the Hindu Women's Conference <sup>474</sup>



Figure 5.1: Images of Image-Making at the Hindu Women's Conference



Figure 5.2: Images of Image-Making at the Hindu Women's Conference

<sup>474</sup> These Images (Figures 5.1 to 5.6) were taken by the author in New Delhi, India on 21, 22, and 23 November 2014. Upon request from my interlocutors, I will not identify them with their names.



and contestation of spaces of pedagogy (seminars, conferences, workshops, lectures, training camps, weekly meetings, book clubs, discussion groups etc.) and the practices they contain, this chapter is divided into four sections.

In *Section 3.2*, I elaborate on the relationship between my interlocutors and their audiences to argue that right-wing women's pedagogical practices contain a host of strategic thought, design, planning, and hierarchies. These strategies pay attention to categories like class, location, and caste and remain crucial to furthering the larger right-wing project. *Section 3.3* engages with the literature on aesthetics and politics to analyse the creative content of right-wing women's pedagogy. Here, I argue that the ritualization of prayer, visual iconography, practices of story-telling, and performance in pedagogical initiatives were crucial to the production of my interlocutors' politics. In *Section 3.4*, I provide a brief ethnographic account of 'things' in educational spaces, arguing that there was a need to examine the material alongside the symbolic to understand right-wing women's pedagogy and politics. Here, I analyse the proliferation and commodification of *everyday* objects, the *creation* of *special* educational spaces through objects, and the role of grandiose objects. Finally, in *Section 3.5*, I briefly elaborate on dissent and disagreement within right-wing women's pedagogical spaces, arguing for the non-monolithic nature of my interlocutors' narratives and politics, and bringing this chapter to a conclusion.

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<http://bit.ly/2c5LD9l>; and Saran, M. (2016). "Modi's siege on JNU: Hindutva's battle for India's classrooms is out in the open." *Quartz India*. <http://qz.com/619185/modis-siege-on-jnu-hindutvas-battle-for-indias-classrooms-is-out-in-the-open/>



Figure 5.3: Images of Image-Making at the Hindu Women's Conference



Figure 5.4: Images of Image-Making at the Hindu Women's Conference



### 3.2 “Even Saraswati, the Goddess of Knowledge, knew who her students were”<sup>49</sup> – Strategic Pedagogical Thought and Practice

It was the third and final day of the World Hindu Congress in Delhi in November 2014. After an initial plenary, the conference had branched out into six sub-conferences (ranging from the Hindu Business Conference to the Hindu Youth Conference). The Hindu Women’s Conference (also referred to as the Hindu Women’s Forum) asserted that its main agenda was to “*increase the role of women in the Hindu resurgence*”.<sup>50</sup> After three days of lectures, panels, keynotes, long discussions, prayer meetings, and lots of conversations and *informal* exchanges, Shantakaji,<sup>51</sup> an elderly lady who was the head of the *Sevika Samiti*, announced that she wanted to meet all the women delegates who lived outside India.<sup>52</sup> Shantakaji is beloved and revered as a Hindutva women’s icon. She is said to have sacrificed and devoted her entire life to *samaaj seva* (service for society) and to teaching women and girls the *proper* Hindu way of female life. Almost every speaker at the conference began her talk by thanking Shantakaji and acknowledging her contribution to Hindutva. Women had been lining up through the three days to get a glimpse of her, touch her feet as a mark of respect, and if they got lucky, take a photograph with her.<sup>53</sup> Groups of NRI (Non-Resident Indian) women were visibly excited at this call for a *private* session. As a researcher from a foreign university, I was also asked to join this meeting.

Dressed in her usual attire—a simple white sari—Shantakaji asked someone to arrange chairs in a circle in the Grand Ballroom of the hotel and asked us to

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Shantakaji, New Delhi, India, 23 November 2014.

<sup>50</sup> Program of the Hindu Women’s Conference, procured in New Delhi, India, 21 November 2014.

<sup>51</sup> *Ji* is an honorific suffix used in Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi to convey respect for the person (usually a person elder to the speaker).

<sup>52</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 23 November 2014.

<sup>53</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 21, 22, and 23 November 2014.



Figure 5.5: Images of Image-Making at the Hindu Women’s Conference



Figure 5.6: Images of Image-Making at the Hindu Women’s Conference



sit down and introduce ourselves. As we went around the circle, women spoke of their lives in *foreign* lands—full of technological and career comforts but also riddled with dislocation and a desire to be involved in the “*Hindu nation and struggles*” while being away from the “*Hindu land*”.<sup>54</sup> Shantakaji addressed these narratives and in a soft-spoken mix of Hindi and English began to speak of *our* specific role in the Hindu resurgence as Hindu women who could not always be in the land that was *ours*. “*Every Hindu woman has a role in Hindutva*”, she said.<sup>55</sup> She continued,

Those who live here, in *Bharat* (India), do different kinds of work on the ground and we [the leadership] teach them how to do this work in their local contexts—in their villages, districts, schools, homes, and cities. But you live abroad, and many of you moved abroad to support your husbands, so that doesn’t mean you have no role or a lesser role—it just means we have to teach you different things. You can still learn to contribute, but in different ways.<sup>56</sup>

She then elaborated on a multitude of efforts that *we*, as “*outsiders with Hindu hearts*” could embrace.<sup>57</sup> These included sending money to Hindu *efforts* at *home*, using technology to spread awareness and educating foreigners not only about Hindu *dharma* (way of life) but also about the “*struggles that we, Hindus, especially Hindu women, are facing in our land as a result of anti-national elements from other religions*”.<sup>58</sup> Pointing to the rise in the “Muslim problem” in Europe and the US, she insisted that *they* would understand *our* voices.<sup>59</sup>

After three long days, Shantakaji, a frail lady in her seventies, was exhausted and could barely walk and stand. But she thought it pertinent to specifically

<sup>54</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 23 November 2014.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 23 November 2014.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

## Series Two: Found Objects of Leisure at Givat Oz V’Gaon <sup>475</sup>



Figure 5.7: Found Objects of Leisure at Givat Oz V’Gaon



Figure 5.8: Found Objects of Leisure at Givat Oz V’Gaon

<sup>475</sup> These Images (Figures 5.7 to 5.16) were taken by the author at Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, in August and September 2014.



address Hindu women who lived abroad in a separate and special gathering. She wanted to make sure that *we* understood that the teachings of Hindutva were also applicable to *us*, even with differences in how *we* learned and how *we* were to teach. Her efforts went a long way to reassure and include Hindutva women who had often found themselves disconnected from previous conversations at the conference.<sup>60</sup> Her efforts, emotionally moving for the directed audience, were merely a part of a larger pattern of strategic thought and practice that is espoused by women leaders of both Hindutva and Zionist organizations.

I begin this section with this narrative as it encapsulates the important aspects of right-wing women's strategic approach to pedagogy. Shantakaji *created a special session* to connect with a section of her 'students' within a larger pedagogical event—the World Hindu Congress and the Hindu Women's Conference. Her audience at this session affected (and was affected) by the mode of conversation and the spatial aspects of the setting. In this case, affluent Hindu women from the 'West' sat around on comfortable couches and chairs in the ballroom of a five-star hotel in Delhi. The circle made the conversation flow with everyone being able to locate who was speaking, and more importantly, with everyone being able to look at Shantakaji throughout the session. Her visible interest and empathetic and affective manner was moving for the other women even though Shantakaji did not speak from personal experience. Her attention to contemporary debates around multiculturalism and racism in the 'West' drawing her 'students' in and closer to her words. This section builds on these observations and presents narratives that address three main points—the role of the audience in right wing women's strategies of education; divisions, hierarchies, and modes of

<sup>60</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 21, 22, and 23 November 2014.



Figure 5.9: Found Objects of Leisure at Givat Oz V'Gaon



Figure 5.10: Found Objects of Leisure at Givat Oz V'Gaon



exclusion and inclusion in pedagogical practice; and the personal-political relevance and technological finesse of these strategies and practice.

### **First Tell Me, Where Do You Come From?**

In this first subsection, I argue that right-wing women's strategies of education are formulated by and for a specific target audience. Looking particularly at age and relationship to the movement (in terms of location and citizenship/diaspora status) of their 'students', women create entire tailored pedagogical programmes. This specificity ensures relevance, interest, and also exemplifies laborious and critical thought on pedagogy. To elaborate on this, I'd like to provide a narrative that details how Zionist settler women, and in particular the settler women's organisation—Women in Green—devise their pedagogical practices.

The activists from Women in Green are well known in the settler community in *Judea* for their *serious* educational events. Dinah, an articulate and bold forty-year-old Jewish woman, has been spearheading the academic programme for the organization for the last few years. Living in the settlement of Efrata in the Southern West Bank, a mother of three boys, she was, as she said, "always on the go".<sup>61</sup> During our first meeting, she told me,

I used to be a leftie in my younger days; marching in Tel Aviv against my own country. I am ashamed of my past and myself. It was only in the late nineties that I realized the lies I was being fed. Leftist activists all along were teaching me that we were bad people doing horrible things to good people and then I realized I had to re-learn everything. I started reading about the Arabs and their brutality—how they used their own babies to shield themselves. I began studying the Qur'an to



Figure 5.11: Found Objects of Leisure at Givat Oz V'Gaon



Figure 5.12: Found Objects of Leisure at Givat Oz V'Gaon

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Dinah, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 12 August 2014.



know more about the violence in their religion and I went to *Judea* and *Samaria* and it felt like home. My husband and I moved to Efrata and since then I have been coming up with ways to *educate* and *tell* others about the *truth*.<sup>62</sup>

Women in Green's academic schedule is filled with a variety of events—ranging from talks, seminar series, lectures, workshops, conferences, political meetings, discussion groups, book and reading clubs, youth education groups, to even a debating group. These events are held in various places and spaces across the settlements of the Southern West Bank (mainly Efrata, the Gush Etsyon block, and Kiryat Arba), in cities such as Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and in 'newly re-captured' lands and hills such as the outpost-settlement of Givat Oz V'Gaon.<sup>63</sup> The physical sites within these spaces range from living rooms, offices, formal meeting spaces to synagogues, cafes and restaurants, and even streets and pavements.<sup>64</sup> Headed by my interlocutor Dinah, there was a committee of about ten women who were the decision makers and planners of the academic programme. As Ruth, a member of this committee pointed out,

Although we make the plans and decisions we also ask the younger girls and some of the older women what they want. Also, the leaders [referring to Nadia Matar and Yehudit Katsover] sometimes organize events themselves; they know the audience usually and they know what is needed. In such events, we just help out in any way we can.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> For most of 2012 and 2013, these events were held at Shdema near Bethlehem. After the events of the summer of 2014, they moved to Givat Oz V'Gaon near the Gush Etsyon junction.

<sup>64</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 12 and 27 August 2014.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Ruth, Jerusalem, Palestine, 13 August 2014.



Figure 5.13: Found Objects of Leisure at Givat Oz V'Gaon



Figure 5.14: Found Objects of Leisure at Givat Oz V'Gaon



Ruth's reference to the two leaders of Women in Green reminded me of something. As I had observed on many occasions, Nadia, the leader of the organisation who was fluent in English, often got calls on her mobile when she was around me. Her end of the conversation would usually be an enquiry of – *“Where are they/you coming from?” “How many of them/you are coming?” “How old are they/you?” and “How long do they have with me/us?”*<sup>66</sup> Every couple of days (more so in the summer), a group of non-Israeli (or those not resident in Israel) Jewish visitors would arrive at the outpost-settlement. Usually accompanied by a local host, these visitors would arrive in an SUV or minivan and were often from the same city if not the same synagogue or Jewish school. Most frequently coming from Canada, the US, Western Europe, South Africa, and Australia, the group would visit Israel to learn about the *“plight of Israelis, especially the pioneers [settlers] who lived at the borderlands”*.<sup>67 68</sup>

The groups also usually wanted to *“work the land”, “feel connected to the soil and earth of Israel”* and *“understand concretely how we [they] contribute to the Zionist cause from far away and make a real and actual contribution to Eretz Yisrael”*.<sup>69</sup> After gathering the crucial details with her few short questions, Nadia would summon the academic team and organise the details of the visit. The age of the visitors and their relationship to the state of Israel (citizenship and/or Diaspora status) were the most important factors in these efforts. They would set the programme, tease out the intricacies of the plans and the geographies of where it would unfold, ensure they had any equipment (especially tools to

<sup>66</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 12, 18, 21, and 22 August 2014.

<sup>67</sup> It is pertinent to mention that these groups were different from the youth groups coming in for the Birthright Tour and were usually composed of people who had already done the Birthright trip and *still* wanted to know more.

<sup>68</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 12, 18, 21, and 22 August 2014.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 18 August 2014.



Figure 5.15: Found Objects of Leisure at Givat Oz V'Gaon



Figure 5.16: Found Objects of Leisure at Givat Oz V'Gaon

*work the land*) that was needed, organise a fieldtrip to another settlement or outpost if needed, and finalise the division of labour amongst themselves.<sup>70</sup>

The arduous thought and planning that went into this pedagogical process became evident to me early on during my ethnography when I witnessed the arrival of one of these groups. Approximately twenty-five young people (between the ages of sixteen and twenty four) belonging to a Toronto-based synagogue arrived at the outpost-settlement one morning in late August 2013.<sup>71</sup> Nira, an older and very eloquent member of the organization, greeted them upon arrival and offered them drinks and snacks. Nadia later told me that Nira wanted to get more involved in the pedagogical activities of the group and had trained to take on the role of the woman who welcomed the visitors.<sup>72</sup>

Nira, smiling softly, told the visitors that they were lucky to be present at these “*newly reclaimed Jewish land previously stolen by Arabs*”.<sup>73</sup> As the group made themselves comfortable in a canopy that was usually used for birthday parties and children’s events,<sup>74</sup> Nadia arrived along with Dinah. Nadia, like Sarah Nachson, then began to speak about her life, the work of the organization, and her immense and all-consuming love for the land of Israel. Although this was a story I had heard previously (and one that was well rehearsed and scripted), she made specific additions relevant to this group. These included anecdotes related to her visits to Canada, snippets of Canadian politics, the role of Canadian Jews in Israel, and the strength and possibilities of youth and young people. Speaking with emotion, she then

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<sup>70</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 18 August 2014.

<sup>71</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 21 August 2014.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 21 August 2014.

<sup>73</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 21 August 2014.

<sup>74</sup> I will discuss this in more detail in *Chapter Five* on intimacy in these spaces.

## 5.5 Conclusion: The Limits of Intimacy

I had begun this chapter with narratives of the Abraham family. In these *stories*, alongside a sense of intimacy, there existed points of exclusion; for instance, the son of Doctor Abraham and Malka, Shmuel, was refused a space within the boundaries of the community of *Kiryat Arba*. These limits of intimacy ensured that norms of morality, goodness, and appropriate behaviour and politics were upheld amongst Zionist settler women and their families. Like Shmuel, women (and men) who were deemed to be rude, *insane*, and not quite all right were left outside of the practices of care and friendship. Women who displayed empathy (however limited) for Palestinians or left-wing Israelis, who did not dress or behave *properly*, who challenged norms and boundaries beyond *acceptable* limits, and who were deemed to be immoral and overly materialist, were shunned from these networks of intimacy. The spatial architecture of settlements, while nurturing closeness, also provided a means of governance of the community, making it easy to enforce boundaries around care and intimacy (Weizman, 2012). Furthermore, my interlocutors from the Women in Green also asserted that “Russian Jews, who had moved to *Kiryat Arba*, did not deserve to be a part of the community as they did not believe in this land and were only there to live comfortably”.<sup>476</sup> Sarai even mentioned that “*Russians were the cause of drugs, prostitution, and crime in Kiryat Arba*”, necessitating their exclusion along racial and ethnic lines and even questioning their *Jewishness*.<sup>477</sup> Similarly, Hindu right-wing women excluded women who were seen as too immoral, too ‘Western’, too *forward* and not serious enough about the *Hindu* cause. These women were not invited to leisurely gatherings, isolated at events, and not included in the networks of friendship, kinship, and intimacy. As I conclude this chapter, it is significant to map these lines of exclusion; the boundaries of

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<sup>476</sup> Conversation with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 8 August 2014.

<sup>477</sup> Conversation with Sarai, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 28 August 2014.

handed over the group to Dinah, who had prepared a detailed daylong academic and social programme for the young visitors. The programme included three short lectures titled – “*The History and Importance of Zionism*”, “*How Do We Deal with Arab Violence in Judea and Samaria?*” and “*The Role of Diaspora Jewish Youth in the Zionist struggle for Land*”.<sup>75</sup> The lectures were being given by “*educated and learned senior members of Women in Green*”.<sup>76</sup> The programme also included a visit to *Kiryat Arba*, a settlement outside of Hebron. Participants would use this visit to speak to women who lived in the settlement and were politically active and also to visit the holy site of *Me’arat Machpela* (Cave of the Patriarchs). The visit also included two final interesting items—an hour of *working the land* followed by a late evening of religious and cultural songs and music.<sup>77</sup> As Dinah explained to me,

These are young visitors, they are the youth; they are fit and full of energy and stamina. They don’t just want to us teach them about our struggles and the land of Israel by giving them long lectures, they want to learn by doing, by acting, by feeling and physicality. So I have decided to take them to the *Kiryat* where they can interact with people and visit the *Me’arat* and then when we come back I will make them dig the land where we are setting up a new tent in our hill [the outpost-settlement]. Let them feel the soil with their hands and do some work—that is what they want, that is what they will remember from all I teach them.<sup>78</sup>

In the evening, after they returned from the *Kiryat*, I watched the youngsters get excited about *working the land*. Dressed in t-shirts/tank tops and shorts, most of them poured sunscreen on each other’s backs (in spite of the setting

intimacy were brutal and while they isolated some, they only strengthened the bonds of the *acceptable* members of these movements and community further.

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In this chapter, I have called for an understanding of intimacy as it shapes and is shaped by the politics of right-wing women. I argue that to fully understand the intimate and affective politics of Hindu right-wing and Zionist settler women, there was a need to unpack their practices and spaces of friendship and sociability as well as leisure and pleasure. It is through these spaces of joyful intimacy that Hindu right-wing women and Zionist settler women build bonds of love and care, experience happiness and *peace*, and nurture their selves, communities, and larger political causes. I, therefore, examined practices of friendship and socialization amongst my interlocutors in India and Israel-Palestine, arguing that friendship and sociability are interesting sites that contain competing discourses of the right-wing (from traditionalist nationalism to neoliberalism), intersectional plural identities and narratives of women, and *everyday* bargains and negotiations by women. Friendships enabled my interlocutors’ politics and shaped their political subjectivities. I then examined the sites of leisure and pleasure of right-wing women, asserting that these *locations* emboldened the politics of my interlocutors and intersected with morality, goodness, piety, and religion. Moving away from textual narratives and embracing the desire to decolonise feminist knowledges and build visual histories, I then presented two series of images that encapsulated sites of intimacy in Hindu right-wing and Zionist settler-women. Finally, I offered a brief note on the limits of joyful intimacies, underlining the boundaries and lines of exclusion within these communities.

<sup>75</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 21 August 2014.

<sup>76</sup> Conversation with Dinah, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 21 August 2014.

<sup>77</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 21 August 2014.

<sup>78</sup> Conversation with Dinah, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 21 August 2014.

sun) and drank a few sips of cold water from their personalised and personal water bottles. I walked around as they played pranks on each other—throwing mud and uprooted weeds at each other and hysterically laughing at their responses. I watched as the girls posed for selfies—big smiles, eyes into the camera, shovels and spades touching their hands on one end and embedded in this *distant* land they loved so much. The boys posing in particularly macho photographs with shovels on their shoulders, biceps out, and chests broadened. Grins and laughter surrounded their working area, and every few minutes I would get a request to take a photo of a group with their latest iPhones. As I clicked their pictures, I thought of the spirit of the *kibbutz* depicted in Zionist literature and film. There were echoes of that spirit, however twisted and warped it might be with the inclusion of Instagram, gadgets, selfies, and ‘modern’ sexualised and gendered ways of being.<sup>79</sup> Nira, who was still around, saw me taking these requested pictures, laughed and said,

Silly kids! But fun is part of the teaching experience. Let them dig some dirt and pose for photographs and then sing and dance to a night of music. This is what they will put up on Facebook and that is how we will get publicity. In the end, whatever gets our message across, right?<sup>80</sup>

Her savvy and technologically forward thinking on publicity amused me. Nira and I watched the youngsters *work the land* until it was time for them to clean and wash up and retreat to the front of the outpost-settlement to enjoy a concert of song and dance and let music and moonlight take over settler women’s pedagogical strategies. With every song, I winced and grieved at this promulgation of Zionism and the settlement of Palestine.

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<sup>79</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 21 August 2014.

<sup>80</sup> Conversation with Nira, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 21 August 2014.

Finally, as I end this chapter, I must confess that I *still* retain some discomfort about detailing the affective and joyful intimacies in the lives of women who further violent nationalist and settler-colonial right-wing politics. *Joy. Love. Pleasure. Leisure. Friendship. Community. Sociability. Emotions. Affect. Intimacy. How do/did I talk about the politics of joyful intimacy when it is nestled within the politics of hatred and violence?*

Here, I remember a story that my Zionist settler interlocutor, Nadia, narrated to me. Recollecting memories from 1993, she elaborated,

We assembled a group of about thirty women and set out to claim our land, a place we called, *Givat Hadagan* (Hill of Grain) in *Judea-Samaria*. Soon, more women joined us. And then the IDF soldiers came to arrest us because of our horrible government. They pushed me down the stairs and arrested us. But you know what? The best way to have a great relationship with your husband is to get arrested with your mother-in-law.<sup>478</sup>

Nadia laughed.

As I struggle to articulate my academic anxieties about mixing joy, intimacy, and violence, Nadia and other right-wing women had no trouble traveling between these, with these, within these, every single day, strengthening the violent nationalist and settler colonial projects as they did.

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<sup>478</sup> Conversation with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 8 August 2014.



There has been plentiful scholarship on the Jewish and Israeli diaspora and its connection to the politics of Israel and Zionism (Boyarin & Boyarin, 1993, 2002; Sheffer, 2002, 2005; Safran, 1991, 2005; Butler, 2013). Several of this recent work has been uncritical of Zionism and Israeli settler colonialism and has actually focused more on emigrant Israelis than the Jewish diaspora (Sabar, 2012; Lev Ari, 2008; Rebhun & Lev Ari, 2010).<sup>81</sup> While Lev Ari, Mansfeld, and Mittelberg (2003) and Lev Ari and Mittelberg (2008) have examined the role of ‘tourism’ and ‘educational’ travel in the links between diaspora and Israel, I want to turn to the work of Jasmin Habib here.

Habib (2004) elaborates on the relationships North American Jews develop with Israel to examine the links between diaspora, homeland, and Zionism. As an anthropologist, she spends time immersed in the communities of North American Jews attending events organised by synagogues, schools, and Jewish and Israeli lobby organisations (such as United Jewish/Israel Appeal, the Jewish National Fund, Friends of the Hebrew University) (Habib, 2004:11). She also travels with her interlocutors to tours of Israel organised to educate the Jewish diaspora and to allow them to experience the ‘homeland’. Habib’s rich ethnography details the educational nature of these tours and the subjectivities of the educators and the students, but it doesn’t engage in depth with how the politics of settlers in the West Bank intersect with these visitors.

Building on Habib’s work, I make two arguments here. First, the educational tours and visits undertaken by the Jewish diaspora become important sites of alignment, contestation, and negotiation between the diaspora and the ‘homeland’ as well as religious/cultural/ethnic belonging and the Israeli state.

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<sup>81</sup>Amit (2016) adds to these bodies of literature by examining Israeli diaspora and (e)migration not through the lens of attachment to ‘home’ and Israel but as a political act and an un-heroic resistance to Zionism.

## 6

### **The Aggressive and the Everyday: Violence and the Politics of Right-Wing Women**

#### **6.1 Introduction: Four Stories of Violence**

It was the third day of the annual weeklong Konkan region summer camp being held in Kalyan, a town outside Mumbai, organised by the *Durga Vahini*. As per schedule, the hundred and fifty participants (between the ages of thirteen and thirty) were woken up at the crack of dawn and were asked to assemble in the large playground of the school where the camp was taking place. As the girls trickled into the ground, Rochana, the 24 year old facilitator of the morning activities, screamed in Hindi,

Discipline yourselves! You have been too pampered at home by your parents and your easy lives. Your service to the nation is only something you think about on weekends and your free time. But this camp has been organised to make you strong every day. You HAVE to get up at dawn and make yourselves stronger, capable of violence, of conquering the enemy, otherwise how will you fight for the nation? TELL ME, HOW WILL YOU?<sup>479</sup>

Her words echoed through the vast ground only punctuated with whispers of the slightly terrified young girls. The girls arranged themselves in rows and columns, at “one-arm distance”, as instructed by Rochana.<sup>480</sup> At the head of the ground was a saffron flag, still and non-fluttering on the hot and humid May morning. Next to the flag was a table covered with a saffron cloth, holding two large photo frames, a tray with supplies for ritual prayer

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<sup>479</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 10 May 2014.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid.

Visitors either (and dominantly) express allegiance and empathy to the narratives of the settler women and/or leave with discomfort at the extra-judicial territorial expansion of the state and the violence of the right-wing (women). Second, settler women are key to the shaping of these relationships and diasporic and national subjectivities through their everyday politics and strategic pedagogical initiatives and practices that pay specific attention to age and relationship to the state. The latter, a gendered point that is under-explored and neglected in research on diaspora, Israel, and Zionism as well as on right-wing women and their politics.

This discussion on the audience of right-wing women's pedagogies, especially the focus on diaspora, is also an interesting site to unpack the convergence and divergence of Hindu nationalism and Zionism and women's politics in both. Like the Jewish and Israeli diaspora, the Hindu and Indian migrant communities maintain a close relationship with the 'homeland'. In fact, as Anderson (2015) and Prashad (2013) elaborate, diaspora groups from both nations/movements have relied on each other for support and inspiration. Jewish and Hindu group leaders in the UK and the US have met regularly, speaking at each other's events and engaging in bilateral conversations (Anderson, 2015:55). But these connections go deeper, and into the everyday of right-wing women's politics. Like Women in Green's approach to pedagogy, the Hindu right-wing women's groups also strategize around audiences and their experiences/needs, including diaspora groups into their educational plans in very particular and tailored ways, albeit with some limitations, wherein lie the divergences between these projects.

This relationship of the Indian Hindu diaspora to India has shaped Hindu nationalism in numerous ways—from financial support to ideological

ceremonies, fresh flowers, and a printed sheet with the names of the participants. In front of the framed photographs of *Bharat Mata* (the Mother Goddess) and Sadhvi Rithambara, the founder of the organisation, Rochana ticked off names on the printed list. The girls, barely awake, timidly muttering "present" as their names were called. With every name, Rochana got louder and louder, imploring the girls to respond with the same energy and might. By the time "roll-call" finished, the chatter of the girls got louder and impatient.<sup>481</sup> As I wiped my forehead and drank another sip of water, Rochana yelled, asking for silence. She lit a prayer lamp in front of the photographs, and asked her co-facilitator Roshni to read the *Morning Prayer*. As Roshni read out the prayer in Hindi with a few words of Marathi creeping in, the girls repeated the text after her.<sup>482</sup> Rochana, then taking up the lead again, spoke loud and clear,

I want to remind you of a story: A Hindu woman was traveling in a train. And a Muslim man molested her. The Hindu woman's husband could not help her because he was sick and feeling very weak. So no one could save her and the Muslim man took advantage of her. Do YOU want to end up in a situation like that? Don't YOU want be strong enough to defend yourselves and defend your land and your nation against those anti-nationals who try to bring shame to it? This is a time when our Hindu land is being molested by many other people who want to see it destroyed. So this is a time when we must rise and embrace violence—so we can protect our land and our nation every day—in our streets, our neighbourhoods, on trains, on buses, on battlefields, on borders, everywhere. So raise your hands, up and left, and down, and right. Again.... Again... Now stretch your arms, stand

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<sup>481</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 10 May 2014.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid.

strengthening to political partnerships with and within the ‘West’<sup>82</sup> (van der Veer, 1994; Bhatt & Mukta, 2000; Mukta, 2000; Rajagopal, 2000; Anderson, 2015). As Bhatt and Mukta (2000) elaborate, Hindu nationalist organisations have been established in countries with a significant Hindu diaspora and these have been crucial to Hindutva’s drastic public visibility in recent years. Hindu nationalists in the diaspora have often mobilised using a language that showcases “Hindu hurt” (Anderson, 2015) and racism and disrespect against Hindus through the use of anti-orientalist and anti-imperialist narratives<sup>83</sup> (Mukta, 2010).

However, in a divergence from Zionist pedagogical techniques, the Hindu diaspora’s links to Hindu nationalist women takes on a different modality. While Zionist settler women have a near constant flow of diaspora members/tourists of all ages (but especially youth) to educate, members of the Hindu diaspora rarely seep into everyday Hindu right-wing life within the depths of the country. There are no organised tours or educational visits, and while they might join charitable efforts, diaspora members rarely visit local branches and everyday events unless accompanying relatives.<sup>84</sup> For these members abroad, the presence of Hindu nationalist organisations within the diaspora and within the countries they live in as well as the organisation of big annual/biennial serious conferences (in India and abroad) sufficed as spaces of learning, educating, and connecting. Right-wing women like my

<sup>82</sup> For example the UK visit of Indian Prime Minister and Hindu right-wing leader Narendra Modi in November 2015 was a flamboyant expression of the *solid* and *special* links between India and the UK. His lecture at Wembley was introduced by David Cameron and attended by 60,000 people including several UK MPs. Four UK MPs also publicly “donated” their pay rise to add to the funds for Modi’s visit. See these for more - <http://bbc.in/20Z2Sg2> & <http://bit.ly/2cGSHhb>

<sup>83</sup> Similar to the Jewish diaspora that organizes around BDS and anti-Semitism using a language of anti-orientalism.

<sup>84</sup> It should be clarified that youth from the Indian diaspora do engage in “gap year” tourism and “social work” in India but their universities usually organize these programs.

on your toes and stretch your legs. Get ready to run and make your bodies strong so they may defend your land.<sup>483</sup>

As the girls ran laps around the ground and I thanked my stars I didn’t have to do the same, I realized that I had heard facilitators from the organization repeat these prayers and stories several times during the past few months. Every single time they did it, in spite of the differences in their physical surroundings, bodies, personalities, voices, accents, and styles, there was an uncanny similarity in how they delivered those words of violence. Their stance took a certain form, their bodies moved in similar patterns, their voices inflected at particular points, their punctuations kept in synch with the movement of their hands, their eyes danced, and their words sounded eloquent, commanding, and almost performed.<sup>484</sup> In the Hindu right-wing project (as well as other right-wing movements), narratives (visual, textual, and oral) centred on violence and strength were abundant but also fluid and sophisticated in their presentation and ritualization. Much like the aforementioned ethnographic account, these narratives were performed and ‘preserved’ by the movement’s women as part of their pedagogical strategies providing a gendered aesthetic to the ‘everyday’ political violence of right-wing women.

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I met Sanjanaji, the head of the Delhi chapter of the *Durga Vahini* (The Army of Durga), on a rainy afternoon in Delhi. She lived with her husband and her mother-in-law in a corner of Northern Delhi, accessible only by auto-rickshaw or taxi from the last stop of a busy metro line. It took me a lot of time to find her house, the tiny streets turning corners without warning and the house numbers changing in no recognizable pattern. She called to tell me that I

<sup>483</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 10 May 2014.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid.



interlocutors, thus, only interacted with these subjects through family/friends, the Internet, or at very flashy and big events. Their pedagogical practices that focus on diaspora audiences therefore remain limited to sessions such as the one I began this section with. Sessions that are held at big conferences—in ballrooms, where women sip tea and converse and share their desire to *contribute*. It is also crucial to mention that although my India-based interlocutors did not ‘educate’ overseas members, right-wing women leaders *within* the diaspora take on these roles and practices with similar planning and strategizing; a research site worth exploring in a future project.

Having elaborated on how women’s politics in the Zionist settler project and the Hindu nationalist movement converge and diverge through an examination of pedagogical practices targeting diaspora populations, I also want to mention that Zionist settler women also host numerous non-diasporic and *local* youth groups regularly. These groups are either composed of young people from the settlements visiting Women in Green and their events to attend the *usual* lectures and other pedagogical events or of young people who come from *beyond the Green line* or the *mainland Israel* to learn about settler efforts.<sup>85</sup> Speaking about the former group, Nadia said,

For these groups, we have to have events that are relevant to their lives in *Judea* and *Samaria*. They already know so much because they live it everyday. So what can *we* teach them? It is better to have discussions and debates on current issues affecting their lives, so we set up for that kind of format.<sup>86</sup>

As I observed, Nadia was absolutely correct. These groups often wanted *heated* relevant debates and also used these pedagogical events as sites for

<sup>85</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 21 August 2014.

<sup>86</sup> Conversation with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 22 August 2014.

could ask anyone on the street where the politician and his wife and lived and they would direct me. They did.<sup>485</sup> A few hours after we had placed ourselves in her living room/office—she poised under a framed photograph of the Goddess *Kali* and me opposite her under a calendar published by the BJP—her husband, the local politician, dropped by to chat with her about household matters. “*The driver wants to go home early*”, she explained. “*We really don’t need him that much on some days, when I am working locally, there is no where to go. It is not like we have children to be picked up and dropped off*”, she continued.<sup>486</sup> Astonished that she, a woman who had just a while ago commented on my lack of children in my late twenties, did not have children, I asked her (rather impolitely) why they hadn’t started a family. She sighed and said,

I can’t have children. We tried for many years but it didn’t happen. Then we discussed adoption. I really want to adopt a girl and give her a home—it is our duty as Hindus to do good to those who suffer and girl children suffer so much in India.<sup>487</sup>

Just I was starting to feel impressed by her openness to adoption of a girl child, she continued,

I think only those who do a *kanyaadan* (giving away a bride) ceremony have done all the good deeds they should do in life.<sup>488</sup>

While I was disappointed by this declaration of wanting a daughter only to give her away in marriage to gain good karma, I noted down her need to be ‘good’—in line with many of my interlocutors’ espousal of a certain type of morality and charitable attitude.

<sup>485</sup> Fieldnotes, Delhi, India, 15 February 2014.

<sup>486</sup> Conversation with Sanjana, Delhi, India, 14 February 2014.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid.

socialisation, friendship, and leisure.<sup>87</sup> The groups that came from *the other side of the Green Line*, I noticed, were often visiting these areas for the very first time and, although Israeli, were very disconnected from stories of life in the settlements and were also frightened of being in these *danger-zones*.<sup>88</sup> The academic and educational programmes planned from them were not as basic as those for foreigners but still largely broad and general, aiming to teaching them about life in *Judea* and *Samaria* and the daily struggles it entailed. As Nadia elaborated,

I want those young people to go back to their comfortable and ignorant lives in Tel-Aviv and elsewhere having learned that there are those who are at the frontier, fighting for them to keep enjoying these lives. I want them to tell their families what they have learned and slowly change the politics of mainstream Israel.<sup>89</sup>

Nadia's comment and pedagogical practice based on the widespread belief among settlers that those in *proper* Israel needed to be educated that "*we, frontier Israelis, are not disturbing and ruining a chance for peace but we are ensuring that they can have peace. We are guarding their lives*".<sup>90</sup>

Paying crucial attention not only to citizenship and relationship to Israel, Women in Green are also mindful of age as a crucial factor in designing pedagogy. While strategies for youth are more prescriptive, the organization has a completely different approach for older visitors and members. Older members who have already made *aaliyah* to Israel and are now living in the settlements (or in some cases divide their time between the settlements and the *mainland*) are considered well-acquainted with Jewish religion and culture as well as with the history and politics of Zionism. A weekly lecture

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<sup>87</sup> I will explore this in *Chapter Five* on intimacy, leisure, and friendship in these sites.

<sup>88</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 21 and 22 August 2014.

<sup>89</sup> Conversation with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 22 August 2014.

<sup>90</sup> Conversation with Sarai and Malka, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 28 August 2014.

Later in the evening, Sanjanaji took me to the local office of the organisation. The building, painted yellow and two-storied with quite a few rooms, had lots of clutter, a *verandah* and garden at the front and a balcony upstairs. It stood in the middle of a busy street. A board that read *Durga Vahini* in English and Hindi with a symbol of a young woman holding a sword stood large and upright in front of the building. Underneath the name and image were details—address, postcode, phone numbers—as if this space was like any other place of business—the Xerox and photocopy-printing shop two doors down or the herbal medicine store five doors before it. The ordinariness of this place shattered when Sanjanaji led me to a back room near a backyard/verandah. Adorned with photographs of girls and women doing martial arts, exercises, holding guns, climbing ropes, and looking tough and strong, the room I was told was a sight "*for dealing with Hindu women and Muslim men who were caught up in the business of love jihad*".<sup>489</sup>

Sanjanaji and Manjula (another member who was with us) explained,

Muslim men pretend to be Hindus—they wear a *tilak* (ritual mark on forehead) or a saffron band on their arms and they make young and vulnerable Hindu girls fall in love with him. She resists. He pushes. He woos her—buys her flowers and chocolates, gives her a lot of attention and soon she falls for him, all the while thinking his name is Ram, not Raheem. Next thing you know she is sitting on his motorcycle, behind him, doing things that ruin her morality and reputation. When these men finally reveal they are Muslim she is either too much in love or ruined. She has no choice most of the time and she marries them. And there she is, wearing jeans earlier and now in a *burkha*. Not even going close to meat earlier, and now cutting beef—the flesh of our *gau mata* (mother cow). Then she gives birth to kids and you know these *mullahs*

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<sup>489</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 15 February 2014.

organized at the outpost-settlement (on Friday morning) was usually centred on themes that would interest them. These themes include a detailed discussion of a particular part of scripture or an idea linked to it, an intricate discussion around a particular cultural/religious ritual, or a debate around a political subject.<sup>91</sup> Melanie, an older member of the organization, attended these weekly lectures without a miss. During my fieldwork, she was also in-charge of organising the shuttle bus from Jerusalem to the outpost-settlement for the lecture every Friday morning. Asked about the importance of this weekly event, she elaborated,

For me and the older members [mostly women], Friday mornings become more about learning about specific and holistic things, all of which combine politics, history, scripture, and everyday life and spirituality.<sup>92</sup>

Interestingly, there are also a few select special pedagogical events for older people (especially women who are widowed and divorced) who are of Jewish origin but have not made *aaliyah* (yet). These events and their spaces, as expected, are laced with lessons on Israel, the community and social aspects of daily life in Israel, and the *dire* need to move back and claim the land that was rightfully Jewish.<sup>93</sup>

### **Divisions and Hierarchies; Exclusions and Inclusions**

Having examined the relationship between educational practices of right-wing women and the *origin* and *location* of their audience, in this subsection, I explore divisions, hierarchies, and modes of exclusion and inclusion in my interlocutors' pedagogical strategies. Here, I argue that Hindu right-wing

<sup>91</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 22 August 2014.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Melanie, Jerusalem, Palestine, 7 September 2014.

<sup>93</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 22 August 2014 and 7 September 2014.

they want so many children, they can't stop their lust, and the kids are Muslims. What an amazing way to get our Hindu girls to their side and use them and exploit them.<sup>490</sup>

As I was just beginning to digest this explanation (on Valentine's Day!), Manjula continued,

So this is our love *jihad* counselling and charity centre. When we find out about a couple like this we force them to come here—we even go and surround them in a *jhund* (mob) and drag them here. We take the girl in first, slap her if needed, and try to counsel her about what is happening. Then we bring the boy in, we take off his shirt, and we hit him. We, ladies and girls, we do what we can to beat these boys, teach them a lesson. Shoes, sandals, sticks, hands—all that training comes in; we beat them till they plead that they are sorry and admit to their plans.<sup>491</sup>

In a room full of photographs of women climbing ropes and landing karate moves, the two of them had just pointed out the ghosts of physical violence, of aggression, of abuse disguised in the name of social service and charity. Routine violence that polices communities in the name of 'doing good'. Interestingly, the same violence that granted mobility and agency to one group of Hindu women took shape only after labelling another group of Hindu women as mere victims and naïve subjects of the Muslim other's 'evil' and patriarchal ways.

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In a neighbourhood that had two very active branches of the *Durga Vahini* in Thane, a city just outside of Mumbai (often referred to as a suburb of Mumbai), I was making my way to meet my interlocutors at a rally they had

<sup>490</sup> Conversation with Sanjana and Manjula, New Delhi, India, 14 February 2014.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid.

women espouse a deeply engrained Hindu nationalist system of hierarchies and geographical branches that serves as sites of exclusion and inclusion; whereas, Zionist settler women's pedagogical practices find divisions along lines of sex/gender and elitism/education. Thus I'd like to elaborate on three axes of pedagogical configuration here—the broader hierarchies and structures of women's organising; the role of sex/gender in designing content; and the elitism and class of participants.

To elaborate on the first, it is pertinent to mention that the pedagogical spaces of Zionist settler women that were discussed in the previous subsection either operate through the somewhat concise organizational structure of Women in Green or through fluid social and community linkages.<sup>94</sup> On the other hand, Hindu right-wing women's pedagogical practices descend into a vast and deeper model of institutionalised division based on age of the members and type of actions and events espoused. To detail the latter, I'd like to discuss the nuances of the structure of Hindu right-wing women's organizations and their educational practices.

The *Samiti* is open to girls and women of all ages. It holds educational events in both, weekly meetings, known as *sabhas* held in the neighbourhood *shakha* (branch) as well as in special camps, held at district, state, and national levels. The *Durga Vahini*, open to girls and women between the ages of 13 and 35 also follows the same system of educational events. When asked what the difference in the two organizations' pedagogical thought and planning was, Veena, a seasoned member of *Durga Vahini*, smiled and said,

<sup>94</sup> While the Israeli state's operation of *hasbara* (public relations/propaganda) and educational tourism is institutionalized through the state, settler women's versions and involvement remain looser and more fluid in structure (and intense in practice).

organized. The rally was to mark twenty years of their chapter of the organization, to support Modi's election campaign, and to "*just tell people that the women of Durga Vahini were the rulers of this area*".<sup>492</sup> It was humid and rainy day, an unexpected shower had definitely soothed the temperature but not the heaviness of the air. I got off the train at Thane station after a long ride from *my corner* of Mumbai and was walking through puddles and potholes to reach the site of the rally. Five minutes into my walk, I ran into Neha, the college-going daughter of one of the leaders of the Thane chapter. Neha was young, sociable, and outgoing and went to university in South Mumbai. She was not too interested in all things Hindutva but sometimes tagged along with her mother. Today, she was with a big group of girls—nine or ten of them in all—and they were all visibly excited, running towards the park where the rally was. I tried my best to keep up with them and walk at their pace, wondering what the rush was. Almost reading my mind, Neha jumped and said,

*Aai* (mother) just messaged me. Some Muslims have come to the rally and they are creating trouble. So we are going to rush there and throw some stones and shoes at them.<sup>493</sup>

Her friend, Rithika, chimed in,

It is very exciting—how dare they come and obstruct our rally—we are going to kick them so hard they won't know what hit them.<sup>494</sup>

Almost like a cheerleading squad's synched squeals, the other girls screamed. "*Yes we are going to show them who is boss!*" "*They won't know what is coming their way!*" "*Woohoo!*"<sup>495</sup>

<sup>492</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 14 April 2014.

<sup>493</sup> Conversation with Neha, Rithika, and their friends, Thane, India, 14 April 2014.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid.

The Samiti teaches you how to be good Hindu women in the daytime and in the light and we teach you how to be good Hindu women at night and after dark.<sup>95</sup>

She wasn't referring to anything remotely sexual, but to the importance of violent (or 'self-defensive') and aggressive tactics in the teachings of the *Durga Vahini*.

Both these organizations have defined local neighbourhood teams, village teams, various city teams, a master city team, district teams, state teams, and a national team that plans and executes various pedagogical events. Each team has several women with at least two women leaders and can be further divided into sub-teams if needed (for example, sub-teams on content, marketing, social activities at educational events). While the local team usually plans prayer meetings and regular sessions, the other teams also plan *special* events like summer and winter training camps, military camps, martial arts training, religious camps etc. Every year, the national teams of all women's organizations under the Hindutva umbrella meet to plan the annual strategy. Similarly, all district teams within a state and all city and village teams within a district meet regularly as well. There are clear hierarchies and leadership positions that have to be attained (and are not passed on or voluntary). Additionally, members of the national team form a special team called the Hindu Women's Forum, which then organizes the biennial Hindu Women's Conference. The conference requires months of work and planning—from sourcing the speakers to forming the programme to logistical management at the venue to publication, publicity, and marketing- and often this team exclusively works on these tasks, relinquishing other duties.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Interview with Veena, Thane, India, 13 April 2014.

<sup>96</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 17 February 2014 and 21 November 2014. Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 10 and 13 April 2014 and 11 May 2014.

There was joy in the air alongside excitement (and my anxiety). I managed to ask Neha why she was getting so involved as she usually didn't care for her mother's political activities. She replied, matter-of-factly,

Because this time it is actually fun. We get to show them our strength. It is not some boring lecture or religious event. We get to go there and show these boys, these mullahs, that we are not going to let them ruin our event, our country, our life. And we get to do this together. All of us. We will stand there together and throw stones until those bastards run away.<sup>496</sup>

If you were looking at this group from across the road, you'd think they were going to a movie, to a mall, to a college party, to a picnic, to dinner, to jump in puddles and stroll in the city on a rainy day in the hot summer.<sup>497</sup>

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After a meeting with key members of a suburban chapter of the *Durga Vahini* in Mumbai, I was asked to join them on their *daily walk*.<sup>498</sup> When upper middle-class women in suburban Mumbai speak of a daily walk, they almost always refer to a fitness regime that involves them donning sporty shoes and 'power circling' a walking track in a local garden while catching up with their friends and neighbours. *Daily walks* are serious business in suburbia—a sentiment that echoed with those participating in this one.

We left our meeting place, the small office of the chapter, and got into the car of one of the women. Unsure of what this 'walk' entailed and cursing myself for wearing the wrong shoes, I asked Prabha, the woman sitting next to me, to

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<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

<sup>497</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 14 April 2014.

<sup>498</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India 7 January 2014.

While both the aforementioned key organizations follow the same broader organizational and strategic plan, there are some key differences in their thinking and practice. The *Samiti*, which remains more inclusive in terms of age, caste and class backgrounds, fitness and health levels, and physical ability, focuses more on religious and intellectual education. It, therefore, plans educational events that will be suited to its varied audience on themes that are more generic and can accommodate a diversity of thought and life experience. The *Durga Vahini* focuses on the female youth and in addition to teaching about religion and intellectual issues, has a strong focus on the physical and martial. Their pedagogical planning, thus, involves organizing and executing events that train young women in weapon use, martial arts, physical fitness, muscle strengthening, juxtaposed alongside lessons on “Hindu values of motherhood, wifehood, honour, religion, and intellectual and spiritual purity”.<sup>97</sup> As Veena elaborated,

The key issue is to make sure the girls remain interested in the latter and don't get exhausted from the first...but then we also acknowledge we are changing—some of us have even talked about love and relationships in our teaching sessions.<sup>98</sup>

In addition to the two main organisations mentioned here, there also exist several others such as one for mothers in the movement, *Matru Shakti* (Power of the Mother) and one for charity, *Chetna Samiti* (Awakening Organisation).<sup>99</sup> Hindu right-wing women's rigid and institutionalised organizational structure has been inherited from the male end of the movement. As Hansen (1999) has elaborated these rigidities and boundaries in Hindu nationalism enforce efficiency and discipline through the movement. When the movement

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<sup>97</sup> Brochure of the *Durga Vahini*, procured in Mumbai on September 30, 2013.

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Veena, Thane, India, 12 April 2014.

<sup>99</sup> I will discuss the work of this charitable organization in *Chapter Five*.

give me some more information on *where* we were going and *what* should I expect. She laughed and said,

Don't worry, we are not going to exercise or go jogging! You know those Muslim buildings near the back road; they call them *Sultan Nagar*; we are going there. We go there every day and show those people that we won't let them live in peace. We will create problems for them if they want to live in our country.<sup>499</sup>

I had grown up very close to this 'back road' and I was well aware of the group of buildings she was talking about. It has been well-known for a while that Mumbai is a city that brings together people from across the country (if not the world) nurturing solidarities and a shared sense of belonging; sometimes, only to dismantle them with its violent and segregated housing situation. Buildings are commonly advertised or marketed as *Hindu only* or *Vegetarian only* and this has resulted in the creation of religious enclaves (interestingly often through the politics of food). *Sultan Nagar* is an affluent Muslim 'meat-eating colony' that stands in a suburb dominated by Hindu and Jain families.

We reached the area in a quick ten minutes and the women disembarked from the car. Five other young women I had never met before joined us. Reema grabbed my arm and led me alongside her. As the women, children, and old men of *Sultan Nagar* went about their daily routines, the women from *Durga Vahini* began to walk around the outer perimeter of the buildings of the 'colony' shouting anti-Muslim and Hindu nationalist slogans, throwing stones, and carrying sticks.<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>499</sup> Conversation with Prabha, Mumbai, India, 7 January 2014.

<sup>500</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 7 January 2014.

started (under the premise of an anti-colonial project), they offered coordination and consolidation. Today, as the movement spreads and rises to parliamentary power, they offer much-needed unity and competency. Hindu right-wing women's organizations adapted these male formulated structures (Sarkar & Butalia, 1998). However, they also modified these rigidities by ensuring that members could be part of various organisations at the same time and cross-attend pedagogical and other events based on convenience, social networks, and safety. Through pedagogical events, Hindu right-wing women also make room for differences in caste/class/ethnicity—adapting their material, *stories*, and format. Thus the institutionalisation of Hindu right-wing women's organisations and their pedagogical spaces and practices while creating deep divisions and systems of control and hierarchy also allows women to challenge male-formulated boundaries and accommodate difference in small ways.

I'd like to move on to the second point regarding divisions in right-wing women's pedagogies—sex<sup>100</sup> segregation in the pedagogical practices of both organisations. For the Hindu right-wing, organisations and events are dominantly sex-segregated, with pedagogical events organised by women almost never seeing attendance by men in the movement. This is linked to the project's history and the very conceptualization of organizations along the axes of male and female.<sup>101</sup> However, for Zionist settler women activists of Women in Green, these sex-based divisions manifest differently.

Although the organisation has the word *Women* in the title and its membership and leadership is limited to women, some of its academic events

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<sup>100</sup> Used interchangeably with 'gender' by my interlocutors.

<sup>101</sup> In the diaspora, both men and women attend most Hindu right-wing events. This is seen as a result of logistical difficulties in running separate organizations/events.

*"Pakistan jao, Taliban ke paas jao!"* (Go to Pakistan. Go near the Taliban)  
*"Garv se kaho, hum Hindu hain. Bharat hamara aur sirf hamara desh hain. Le jao apne burkhain or bambs!"* (Proclaim proudly, we are Hindus. India is our and only our country. Take away your *burkhas* and bombs.)<sup>501</sup>

They didn't enter the buildings or pass the security guards who looked bored at what seemed to be a *daily* occurrence. The vegetable and fruit seller stationed outside this community, who I had seen many a times while passing by, seemed agitated but also used to this spectacle. Muslim women (some in *hijab* and *burkhas*) looked at the *Durga Vahini* women, shook their heads, and looked away. Some shut their windows and doors and one spat in their/our direction. An old man screamed at my interlocutors and told them to get lost only to provoke more violent shouts from these *guardians* of the Hindu nation. Children played cricket and birds chirped in the early evening. Twenty minutes of screaming, walking around the perimeter, throwing stones at Muslim women and children, and hitting the walls and gates with sticks and they got back into the car. The *daily walk* was over. The violent and aggressive ritual of Hindu nationalist women in suburbia had concluded for today and adrenaline was running high in these young women.<sup>502</sup>

I wanted to know more about this display of violence and the joy and contentment it seemed to have nurtured. I wanted to ask a hundred questions, but I was overwhelmed with emotion and the research simply had to wait. I would never see *my* neighbourhood the same way again. Holding back tears, drowning in the guilt of being a *participant observer* and mourning these deep hate-filled fissures in the fabric of a city I so deeply loved (and a city that had loved me back in endless moments of teenage angst and adult

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<sup>501</sup> Ibid.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid.

are open to both men and women. Moreover, although all events are planned and executed by women, they also, sometimes, contain male speakers. Exclusive events for either sex are also planned as part of the academic schedule and these either deal with a religious issue that is sex-specific (for example, “*Religious Obligations for Women during Sabbath*” or “*Men’s Duties towards their Wives during Wartime*”) or deal with an issue considered too sensitive to be discussed in the presence of the opposite sex (usually related to personal relationships, sexual activity, or bodily matters).<sup>102</sup> Thus, sex becomes an important factor when strategizing pedagogy. Additionally, for the younger generation (especially teenagers), sex-segregated events are usually planned to talk about matters “*that clearly bring out the differences between each gender and their role in Jewish and Zionist life*”.<sup>103</sup> As Nadia and Yehudit elaborated on this sentiment in an interview,

Girls and boys have to be taught from the beginning that *H'Shem* has outlined clear roles for them in the family and they are equal but separate. We don’t want to teach them too much about all this as they have their families and synagogues to tell them about all these things. But what we want to talk about is our struggle with the Arabs and our Zionist aims and how these gender roles are changed by that. .... It is of course hard for us to plan an education that touches upon these ideas of sex, gender, talks about Zionism, and is not boring for our teenagers and youngsters.<sup>104</sup>

Lastly, given that Women in Green promotes motherhood as a Jewish as well as Zionist *obligation*, the academic team also works hard to organise two types of events—those that are family friendly and can be cherished by men,

<sup>102</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 24 August 2014.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Dinah, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 12 August 2014.

<sup>104</sup> Interview with Nadia Matar and Yehudit Katsover, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 22 August 2014.

loneliness), I said goodbye and walked home. I *needed* to grieve and reclaim the very meaning of walking. I *needed* to apologize to those roads that day.

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I begin this chapter with four narratives that are all linked to the complexity and contradictions of violence and how it forms the right-wing woman subject. The first three of these narratives on violence weave a thread through the previous ethnographic chapters—the pedagogical space of the Hindu right-wing women’s training camp; the *practice* of charity and the *goodness* of the right-wing woman subject; and the affective intricacies of intimacies, joy, friendship, leisure, and excitement that shaped my interlocutors. These three *stories* are not only accounts of violence but are also channels that *connect* the subjectivities and the everyday politics of right-wing women with one another *and* with the underlying shadow of political violence. Violence ties together the women, their subject positions, the organizations, the actions, the spaces and the practices, and the ‘everyday’ mobilizations that ‘empower’ them. Violence also binds together the narratives in this thesis, bringing this ethnography to an uncomfortable conclusion.

Examining political violence by right-wing women, this chapter argues that women in these movements mobilise on a *daily* level through various discursive and physical acts of violence and aggression. To interrogate the role of violence in forming right-wing women’s subjectivities, following this introduction, this chapter delves into a few concrete themes in four sections. In *Section 6.2*, I examine the language of violence uttered, written, and repeated by women in the Hindu right-wing and the Zionist settler project. Arguing that a language of violence allows women to *queer* themselves and construct new identities and roles, this section draws on the gendered links between language, discourse, and power. It also examines the performative



women, youth, and children and those that aim to educate children and even toddlers. All these aforementioned boundaries of exclusion and inclusion require immense thought and planning on part of Zionist settler women.

A third and final axis on which divisions and hierarchies intersect with right-wing women's pedagogy is elitism and class. In the Hindu right-wing women's project, the annual and biennial conferences (held in metropolitan cities in India or in trendy *foreign* locations such as Bali, Bangkok, New York) become spaces for upper class and educated 'elites' to engage in pedagogical exchange. This was very visible at the World Hindu Congress in 2014 where impeccably dressed men and women brandished their degrees and intellectual opinions in polished and grand ways in a lavish Central Delhi hotel.<sup>105</sup> They arrived in chauffeur-driven cars and also used the space of the Congress to *network* and build career connections. The materiality of this space reflected its inhabitants' class status, a point I will elaborate on in *Section 3.4*. In the Zionist settler project, women draw such boundaries by making provisions for events classified as "overly-intellectual spaces".<sup>106</sup> Dinah, who is present at many such *intellectual* events and organises them as well, pointed out,

Some of our members are very highly educated and are intellectuals. They are professors and journalists and they teach and write for a living. They don't want to come to a basic event about Zionism. They want to know details—details about ISIS and what they are doing, for instance. So every now and then, we organize a teaching event, usually in someone's home, where we invite a speaker who knows details of a current event (sometimes they are from intelligence or military also) and we make a selective guest-list, for intellectuals to attend, so we can

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<sup>105</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 21, 22, and 23 November 2014.

<sup>106</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 12 August 2014 and 3 September 2014.

aspects of these discourses. In *Section 6.3*, I elaborate on the daily and 'everyday' nature of right-wing women's violence, arguing that it is these seemingly mundane and even *harmless* routine acts of violence that contain the contradictions of right-wing women's agency and mobilization. In *Section 6.4*, I examine the strategic use and performance of violence as means for my interlocutors to bargain and negotiate space within their movements. In *Section 6.5*, I visit debates on motherhood and violence, arguing that debates on the two focus dominantly on ideas around 'protection' or 'motherhood gone wrong' and contain a silence on the routine violence of motherhood—where the maternal is complicit and even used to sustain political violence. Right-wing women's actions and violence (that often involve their children) will allow us to re-think these debates and make room for new forms of intersections between political violence and motherhood. Finally, I conclude this chapter by summarizing the key arguments.

## 6.2 Blood and Semen: The Language of Right-Wing Women's Violence

In 1993, after the Oslo accords, Ruth Matar, a Belgian Zionist settler in Palestine, and her daughter-in-law Nadia Matar, together established Women for Israel's tomorrow/Women in Green.<sup>503</sup> Wearing green to protest against the green line that *gave away their land to the Arabs* the women stood in public spaces, spreading their political messages. Nadia, now in her late forties, is the leader of the organization that has seen the involvement of thousands of women and their families. On our first meeting, Nadia, dressed in hiking gear with a cap and a delicate gold necklace that had the map of *Eretz Yisrael* as its pendant, ran around the new outpost-settlement, perpetually active and busy. Taking a break, catching her breath and sighing, she sat down in front of me

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<sup>503</sup> For more see the website of Women in Green – [www.womeningreen.org](http://www.womeningreen.org)

have a proper discussion instead of listening to the same story, over and over.<sup>107</sup>

In early September 2014, Dinah invited me to one such event. I took the private elevator in a fancy building to head to the lavish and expansive terrace of a female right-wing journalist's home in the heart of Jerusalem. The terrace had spectacular views of Jerusalem and the setting sun. The centre of the space had a large polished table filled with cheese plates, wine, and fresh fruits. Fifteen women *intellectuals* (including myself) sat around the table with a US-based female Jewish academic and writer taking centre stage.

The discussion traversed different political subjects (from ISIS to climate change) interrupted by sounds of chewing, astute and sharp questions and observations, nods in assent, sceptical glances, and long sighs. As sensationalised and fear-mongering the discussion was, it made me realise two things about my interlocutors. The level of the conversation, the seriousness of the debate, and the commitment of the participants did necessitate Dinah and her team's efforts to laboriously organize exclusive but detailed educational events in addition to the usual pedagogical fare. This right-wing women's space had an eerie resemblance to bourgeoisie leftie political spaces that were often caricaturised as sites of 'champagne socialism' albeit without the blatant racism and ethnic/religious hatred.<sup>108</sup>

### **The Contemporary, the Relevant, and the Technological**

The third and final major argument this section makes is that right-wing women's strategic pedagogical planning pays close attention to contemporary and relevant personal-political themes as well engages in a sophisticated use

next to a table full of merchandise of the organization. Excitedly, she informed me that she had printed new stickers, t-shirts, and coffee mugs with the organization's logo and catchy phrases that capture its spirit. The logo blue-green in colour with streaks of brown lines, drawn parallel to each other signifies the cultivation and care for *Eretz Yisrael*. The new merchandise with its catchy slogans beckoned to us in both Hebrew and English. Scrawled on the stickers, coffee mugs, and bright green t-shirts were the words – “*Keep Calm and Settle Israel*” “*Keep Calm and Keep Building*” “*Keep Calm and Stay Away from Arabs*”.<sup>504</sup> Nadia informed me that these new slogans and products were the brainchild of the younger girls in the movement. “*They want to sound peppy and fashionable. They keep up with the memes all over the Internet and want to make sure we speak about our efforts in the newest and coolest ways*”, she added.<sup>505</sup>

As we began talking about her work and the organization's politics, she interrupted my questions and asserted that she wanted to make something clear before we could continue our conversation. I nodded and beckoned her to continue. She asked me if I knew the story of the baby and Solomon. Before I could answer, she elaborated,

Two women both made claims to a baby and someone suggested the baby be cut up and each woman could take half the baby. One of the women said it was fine by her and agreed to the plan, whereas the other was aghast and pleaded not to cut the baby. Their reactions decided who the baby belonged to.<sup>506</sup>

Before I could have reacted, she continued,

It is the same with this land. They [referring to 'Arabs'] are okay with just having Judea, Samaria, and Gaza whereas we want it all, intact,

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<sup>107</sup> Interview with Dinah, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 12 August 2014.

<sup>108</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 3 September 2014.

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<sup>504</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 8 and 9 August 2014.

<sup>505</sup> Conversation with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 8 August 2014.

<sup>506</sup> Ibid.

of technology and communication—both of which strengthen their impact and create affective and effective social spaces (Bourdieu, 1989).

To elaborate on this, let me begin with a quote from my interlocutor Dinah. When asked about the political content of pedagogical events, Dinah elaborated,

Political issues are of course an integral part of our events. After all we live in a war-zone; of course we talk about conflict and politics all the time. But to make sure our community is ahead of everyone else in the world, educationally and knowledge-wise, we must keep our events very very current and sometimes even based on events of that week or the day.<sup>109</sup>

Dinah's assertion was in synch with the ethos of the pedagogical practice she and other members of Women in Green espoused. A practice that incorporated themes from contemporary political life as well as from personal-political experiences of its members.<sup>110</sup> This commitment to current affairs and contemporary politics required two things that impacted and were impacted by pedagogy.

First, Women in Green's leaders and organisers constantly needed to find speakers, *specialists*, and *experts* who were qualified enough to talk about current events, making it *necessary* to network and make useful contacts in the strategy and planning meetings and other nation-wide academic events.

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<sup>109</sup> Interview with Dinah, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 12 August 2014.

<sup>110</sup> As mentioned before, an example of this was the tailoring of content to the subject positions of the audience. Events that involved the diaspora almost always included latest *reports* and incidents of anti-Semitism and BDS in the 'West'. My interlocutors, thus, in this case, tapped into larger fears and issues of racism, multiculturalism, and ethnic integration that were on the minds of audience members. Interestingly, they tapped into the same concerns and experiences that Black British feminists have elaborated on. See for instance, the work on race, gender, and migration by Ahmed, S. (1999) and Mirza, H. (1997).

every part of it. They are okay with butchering it up and cutting it slice by slice and letting it bleed. If they can do this to the land, it is not their land. How can they want to cut up something they love? We want it all—intact—because this is our land, our child.<sup>507</sup>

When thinking about right-wing women's language and its violence, the aforementioned conversation is interesting in four ways. First, in both the Hindu right-wing and the Zionist settler project, women's language is filled with blood, gore, and violence that legitimize their everyday acts of aggression. Second, in both movements women establish a normative discourse of the 'Hindu/Jewish' body and nation by constructing and speaking a *queer* language of *unruly* bodies and disgust (Ghosh, 2002). Third, the language of violence draws heavily on religious and cultural iconography as well as experiences of the domestic and *womanhood*. Fourth, the language of violence is then tailored to appeal to a younger *cosmopolitan* demographic by including *trendy* neoliberal and macro-political references. I will now elaborate on these four ways that allow women of the right-wing to not only reify aggression and violence but to also construct themselves as contradictory subjects, straddling different processes and discourses.

### **Blood and Babies: Flesh and Gore**

In a widely circulated video released and uploaded by the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* in 2010, a 13-year-old girl, *Sadhvi* Prachi, speaks to a crowd of thousands of Hindu nationalists in North India. A young activist in the Hindutva women's organizations, Prachi, wearing saffron, sits on a stage in front of a microphone staring at the crowd with a determined gaze. A yellow wall filled with pictures from Hindu mythology stands behind her, only

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<sup>507</sup> Ibid.

Second, all members of the organisation (and especially the leaders and Dinah) were compelled to use various modes of technology and communication to keep abreast of latest developments and news. For this, they had installed multiple applications on their phones, tablets, and computers that sent them instant alerts on any relevant political developments. They were also very active on social media (mainly Facebook and Twitter), posting events, news, videos, and engaging in long discussions and debates.<sup>111</sup> Sarai, who was in-charge of marketing and social media for the organization, regularly held training for the members to “*better their social-media skills*” and make sure that the educational events were current and well-publicized (before and after). She also wanted to ensure that technology and social media were a pedagogical experience by themselves, as platforms where women learn from a range of colleagues and friends and also keep contributing to discussions.<sup>112</sup>

Hindutva women’s organizing overlaps with the aforementioned Zionist women’s politics in various ways such as the attention to debates around racism in the ‘West’, the emphasis on religious and cultural *hurt*, and the constant updates on political events in India and around the world. It also works towards being inclusive to personal-political needs of its members, accommodating new sessions on topics of potential interest. Perhaps the most important point of this convergence is the knowledge and deployment of technology and communication methods (for both, education as well as the publicity of educational events).

Hindu nationalism has *always* utilized technology to further its cause and gain supporters. In the late 1980s and 1990s, during the *Ramjanmabhoomi*

<sup>111</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 3 September 2014.

<sup>112</sup> Conversation with Sarai, Jerusalem, Palestine, 10 September 2014.

visible when her perfectly styled long dark hair moves as she speaks. Wearing a *tilak* on her forehead, she speaks in poetic Hindi with fervour for over ten minutes, her voice rising in anger and passion, tears of rage escaping her animated eyes, her hands moving as she screams,

When Bharat celebrates happiness, Kashmir’s saffron valleys are flowing with blood, the innocents butchered; the wounded lying on footpaths. And no one cares. When Babri falls, politicians beat their chests and cry. They are dogs. Rabid Dogs. They will sell the sky, the earth, and this country while you sleep. So wake up and get ready. Close your fists in anger. If anyone sells our country, get ready to claw their eyes out. We will remove the innards of their eyes and feed them to eagles and vultures. We will clap as the vultures eat their eyes. We will break and tear apart any hands that hurt us. We will kick anyone who tries to ruin us. Who are you? Who is a lion? A lion is the king of the jungle. A lion is not scared of anyone. We are lions. So roar and tell theses Mullahs and Pakistanis that we are not scared of them. We will obliterate them. We will cut them open and watch as the blood leaves their bodies.<sup>508</sup>

As the thirteen-year-old Hindu right-wing girl speaks, the audience screams in approval. Her poetry met with an applause that is reminiscent of her mentor, Sadhvi Rithambara’s speeches in Ayodhya in the 1990s. As the Hindu nationalist leaders rallied to demolish the contested site of the Babri mosque in the early 1990s<sup>509</sup> and build a temple to the Hindu God *Rama* in the spot, women leaders like Rithambara became the *face* of the movement. Clad in saffron, Rithambara’s speeches (like those of Sadhvi Prachi) were laced with

<sup>508</sup> Watch the speech by Sadhvi Prachi on the YouTube Channel of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3RZKWzPJDo>

<sup>509</sup> The mosque was demolished on December 6, 1992 by a violent mob of Hindu nationalist men and women.

movement, VHS tapes of Hindutva ideologues were circulated throughout the country, making their way into families and homes and often urging women to join the movement (Hansen, 1999). In contemporary times, Hindutva's educational leaders (at every level) use the Internet as the main means to dispel information and lessons to a wider audience. Although physical events remain important, the *reach* of the Internet and social media as well as the anonymity and 'safety' it offers, make them very crucial to the Hindutva project. For Hindu right-wing women it is this second reason—of anonymity and 'safety'—that proves to be particularly attractive. Gitika, a young supporter of Hindu nationalism and Modi, a member of *Durga Vahini*, and a very popular figure in Hindu nationalist *Twitter circles*, pointed out to me,

My parents feel safer when I participate online because then I can be home and protected and still be an activist and a teacher.<sup>113</sup>

The importance of this virtual organizing and its links with Hindutva women's pedagogical strategic thought and practice came to light, when in the same interview she later said,

I have to end this early today. I am very busy with some trending on Twitter today.<sup>114</sup>

Not quite understanding what she meant, I pressed on asking her to explain. Looking at me as if I was as old as her grandmother, she exasperatedly spat out,

You know, there are trending topics of twitter? Us, Hindu and NaMo<sup>115</sup> supporter women, are very active in making sure a hashtag trends so we can get our message across. We have to plan it and then attack Twitter together. So for instance if we want to make fun of Rahul

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Gitika, New Delhi, India, 23 February 2014.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> A nickname given to Narendra Modi.

tales of blood and gore. Addressing hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children, she screamed, "*ek dhakka do, Babri masjid tod do (give it one push, and break the mosque)*". On another occasion she asserted, "*khoon ki barsaat honi hain to hone do, unki mahilaon aur bachon ko marna hain to marne do (If there has to be a rain of blood, let it happen. If we have to kill their women and children, let us kill them)*".<sup>510</sup>

Both Prachi and Rithambara's speeches are laced with imagery of blood and gore that serve two purposes. First, they construct the right-wing woman (and man) as one who is capable of *all* kinds of violence and one who *must* be capable and unafraid of bloodshed, gore, and violence. Second, by pointing to the blood that the 'other' sheds and then bringing in the blood that *we* must be willing and able to draw, the right-wing woman absolves herself of *any* guilt associated with this bloodshed. Blood and gore are simply *necessities* as the enemy is 'evil' and his incursions *must* be met with more aggression, even one that involves the killing of children and the flow of bloody rivers.

As highlighted by Nadia's story of the baby and Solomon in beginning of this section, Zionist settlers also use a language of blood and gore to both illustrate the scope of the 'other's' evil as well as to necessitate the use of Zionist violence. In a post on website of Women in Green, a headline about an American rally in support of Israel reads, "*Their Blood Cries Out!*"<sup>511</sup> The entry states, "*Our Blood will no longer flow like water! Our Religion will no longer be violated! Our Land will no longer be divided!*"<sup>512</sup> In several others, Israel is referred to as "blood-soaked" land where the "blood of our brothers is spilled

<sup>510</sup> CD of Sadhvi Rithambara's Ayodhya Speeches, procured from the RSS publishing shop in Jhandewala, New Delhi, India, 12 February 2014.

<sup>511</sup> Nadia Matar and Yehudit Katsover, March 9, 2008 - "*Rallies for Israel: Their Blood Cries Out*" on the WIG Website - <http://womeningreen.org/rallies-for-israel/> Accessed 10 December 2015.

<sup>512</sup> Ibid.

Gandhi<sup>116</sup> that day, we come up with a hashtag that is easy and fun — like #PappuGandhi #YoRahulSoDumb—and then we all tweet in particular ways at particular times so it begins to trend. We bombard twitter and respond to anti-national tweets. This is how we can make sure that Hindutva voices and the teachings of every single leader of ours can dominate even the online world.<sup>117</sup>

This *safety apparatus* for Hindu right-wing women was also the way the movement has emerged as being home to the most vicious and hateful group of trolls on the Internet, specifically targeting women and ‘anti-Nationals’ with threats of (sexual) violence, and acquiring the label of *bhakts*<sup>118</sup> (Ashraf, 2016; Bhushan 2015; TNM Staff, 2016).

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Elaborating on the strategic thought and praxis of right-wing women’s pedagogical practice, this section has argued that pedagogy is much more than an *innate* role ascribed to women of nationalist and settler colonial projects. Right-wing women actively fashion themselves as teachers and *perform* a specific education, designing pedagogic strategies that are dependent on an intersectional positionality of the audience (Butler, 2006a). As my interlocutors’ subject positions and politics are produced out of these encounters, they also shape the subjectivities of their *audiences*, controlling the content and delivery of and the response to pedagogical practices. Through ethnographic narratives, this section has also captured a myriad of

<sup>116</sup> The leader of the Indian National Congress Party — often criticized for his ineptitude and nepotistic gains. Supporters of Modi nicknamed him Pappu — a colloquial term for dumb and stupid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Bhakt translates to devotee. It is a term used to describe Indian right-wing supporters on social media. Bhakts are *devotees* and supporters of Prime Minister Modi and the BJP and have close links to Hindu nationalism and are particularly aggressive on the Internet.

routinely” and where there is a need for us and for God to “avenge this bloodshed”.<sup>513</sup> Furthermore, graphically describing the details of ‘Arab’ violence, another post on the website states,

The blast... sent flesh flying onto second-story balconies a block away. Three men were blown 30 feet; their heads, separated from their bodies by the blast, rolled down the glass-strewn street...One woman had at least six nails embedded in her neck. Another had a nail in her left eye. Two men, one with a six-inch piece of glass in his right temple... tried to walk away... A man groaned... His legs were blown off. Blood poured from his torso... A 3-year old girl, her face covered with glass, walked among the bodies calling her mother’s name...The mother... was dead...One rabbi found a small hand against a white Subaru parked outside the restaurant.<sup>514</sup>

A few paragraphs down, it continued,

Such a blast would crush the chest, rupture liver, spleen, heart and lungs, melt eyes, pull organs away from surrounding tissue, separate hands from arms and feet from legs.<sup>515</sup>

These posts, as they lay out the visceral details of Israeli Jewish dead bodies, are almost always followed by two assertions. One, Palestinian resistance and the *intifada* are just euphemisms for *jihad* and evil/hatred killers. And second, these dismembered bodies and bloodshed *must* be met with bloodshed and violence. Both of these assertions reify the *need* for everyday violence and aggression by settler women.

<sup>513</sup> See the WIG website for these entries – [www.womeningreen.org](http://www.womeningreen.org)

<sup>514</sup> Letter from Ruth Matar, 7 February 2008, “*The Death of Outrage*”, on the WIG Website - <http://womeningreen.org/the-death-of-outrage/> Accessed 10 December 2015.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid.



configurations of social and political life where the local meets the national and the global and the physical meets the virtual. I have also illustrated the nuances and contradictions in right-wing women's politics as well as the convergences and divergences between the two movements. Finally, this section's focus on strategic and laborious thought and its interweaving of the personal and the political has made it clear that right-wing women are political and politicised subjects and agents and *their* pedagogy is crucial to *their* everyday politics. In the following section, I examine the aesthetic *locations* of their pedagogy.

### 3.3 The Aesthetics of Pedagogy: Content, Ritual, and Performance

In the summer of 2014, during Israel's offensive on Gaza, Operation Protective Edge, the Zionist settler organization Women in Green was very active and mobile with Givat Oz V'Gaon, the "newly reclaimed" outpost-settlement being the centre of its pedagogical activities.<sup>119</sup> On an August morning, I witnessed Nadia addressing a group of young Jewish visitors from the United States. Dressed in her usual hiking gear, caressing the pendant around her neck—a golden map of *Eretz Yisrael*—she began to tell this group a story. Standing right in front of them, she spoke animatedly,

A Rabbi from Efrata<sup>120</sup> told me a story that I like to repeat to students and visitors. The Rabbi once interviewed a politician and asked him – how did *your* ultra-orthodox and anti-Zionist Jewish family make its way to Israel? The politician answered that his family ended up in Israel because of his grandfather. When his grandfather was a nine-year-old boy, he suddenly became very weak. His ultra-orthodox

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 8 August 2014.

<sup>120</sup> Efrata is an Israeli settlement located twelve kilometres south of Jerusalem, between Bethlehem and Hebron. It is considered the 'capital' of the Gush Etsyon block of settlements and has approximately 10,000 residents.

Before I move on to the second part of this section that focuses on *unruly* bodies, I want to mention that although it is often the leaders/leading activists/ website editors etc. of these movements that give these speeches and write these posts, the circulation and repetition, as well as performativity of this bloody language ensures that it becomes a part of the quotidian. In the 1990s, when Rithambara gave these provocative speeches in Ayodhya, VHS tapes and audio cassettes of these talks were distributed throughout the country, present not only in every nodal point of the Hindutva movement's system of branches and community centres but also in households, schools, and offices (Hansen, 1999). Prachi's speech video has over one million views on YouTube and has circulated on thousands of blogs, mailing lists, and is also shown at the camps across the country. Similarly, entries posted on the blog run by Women in Green have not only been *crowd-sourced* but also read and referenced by others. Zionist speeches too are circulated widely. In that sense, blood and gore are the centre of both; these *extraordinary* speech-acts as well as the everyday anecdotes and language that accompany and legitimize violence of right-wing women.

### Queer, Leaking, and Unruly Bodies

Having discussed some of the central elements of the language of right-wing women, I'd like to nuance this examination further by dissecting how violence constructs the body of the 'other' as an *unruly* body controlled by an unquenched thirst for both, evil and pleasure, that interrupts the Jewish/Hindu normativity and threatens the Jewish/Hindu land, piety, and chastity. The very presence of this *unruly* body and its excesses then demands heightened everyday violence.

As mentioned in *Chapter Three*, Hindu right-wing women's pedagogical practices draw a binary between the chaste, pious, and asexual Hindu

father took him to a non-Jewish Polish doctor who suggested that the boy be strengthened by either eating pork or by working long hours in a farm. The father, for religious reasons, obviously chose the latter, and the grandfather, a weak child, would go to a farm every day, alone and far-away from home, and he would work long hours. As he worked the land, tired and drained, he was shocked to see that the non-Jewish Polish farmer, who owned the farm, was very happy. This farmer would smile all day and even sing as he worked. So the boy asked the farmer – how *could* you enjoy this work and sing? And the farmer said – I sing because I hear the music of the land. Come near me and listen to the music of the land. Sing along with me... la la la la... Don't you hear the music of the land? La la la la.... The grandfather still didn't hear a damn thing. The farmer told him that the music was probably not audible to him because this was not his land. The nine-year-old Jewish boy with the weak body decided *that very day* that someday he was going to *his* land, the land of the Jews, and he *would* hear the music. The music from the land. *His* music in *his* land. And that is how the politician's family ended up in Israel.<sup>121</sup>

As Nadia narrated this story—singing, speaking—she began to dance and sway, moving her body gracefully, and she then put her head near the rocky ground of the outpost-settlement. She looked up at the visitors and then softly elaborated,

I was born in Belgium and when I lived there as a child, life was good, but my body didn't feel the bond and connection to the land. When we visited Israel for holidays and the door of the plane opened, my soul felt alive. I heard the music. And now we live here, on *our* land, on *my*

<sup>121</sup> Field notes, September 2, 2014.

woman's body and the lustful, rapist, and polygamist Muslim man's threats to this body. The nation, imagined cartographically as *Bharat Mata* (the Mother Goddess) stands pure and undivided as a wholesome body that is then *dismembered* by the Muslim's actions and violence (Ramaswamy, 2010). *Her arms cut off during the partition, minarets growing on her breasts and stomachs; the Muslim other disfigures her beauty, dignity, and chastity.*<sup>516</sup> The Hindu woman, an extension of the motherland and an embodiment of this purity and asexuality, similarly dishonoured and dismembered by the lustful, rapist, pleasure-seeking, violent Muslim man and his ejaculate (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Women's everyday language repeats these narratives and evocations that insist on the *unruly* excesses the Muslim man contains. It also regurgitates the terms—*katta hua* (cut up), *katta* (cut), and cut—as derogatory names for a circumcised (and hence deformed and unruly) penis.<sup>517</sup>

Rithambara's speeches push these semen and penis-related excesses further. In a speech in Ayodhya in 1992, she speaks of the *disobeying* Muslim who opposes the Hindu and the Hindu nation in *every* way. She says,

Whatever the Hindu does, it is the Muslim's religion to do its opposite. If you want to do everything contrary to the Hindu, then the Hindu eats with his mouth; you should do the opposite in this matter too!<sup>518</sup>

Her comment elicited much enthusiasm and laughter from the audience. It also furthered her focus on the body—its secretions, its pleasures, and its displeasures. Similarly, an oft-repeated story in the community sessions and branches speaks of a Muslim invader in the Mughal past where Muslim men urinated and defecated on Hindu temples regularly.

<sup>516</sup> Fieldnotes, Kalyan, India, 15 May 2014.

<sup>517</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 17 June 2014.

<sup>518</sup> CD of Sadhvi Rithambara's Ayodhya Speeches, procured from the RSS publishing shop in Jhandewala, New Delhi, India, 12 February 2014.



land, and we hear the music *all the time*. Unfortunately we have enemies inside Israel who murder our boys and want to take away the music. But we won't let anyone stop the music. *Definitely not the Arabs*. We will stop those who stop the music with violence, with strength, with *every* bit of our body and soul. When *we* work the land, *we* hear the music. And now, as you begin your program with us and *work the land* and live *here* and breathe *this* air, we will hear the music. Together. *And we will smile. And we will sing.*<sup>122</sup>

As the group of young people picked up shovels and other tools and dissipated into the depths of the outpost-settlement to *work the land*, I realized that I had heard Nadia narrate this story at least twice before this day. On all these occasions, she stood in the same position, moved her body in patterns alike, her voice inflected at particular points, her punctuations kept in synch with the movement of her hands, her eyes danced, and her words poured out eloquent and performed. There was no doubt that the story drew on elements close to her lived experiences, but every time she chose to *tell stories*, she *performed* them in ways that drew out the depth of her personal-political involvement in her cause and had a strong affective impact on her audience.

In *Section 3.2* I had examined the role of the audience in the crafting and execution of right-wing women's pedagogical strategies. While that section focused on the relationships between my interlocutors and their audiences, I'd now like to raise a different question – *What is the substance of right-wing women's pedagogical narratives that facilitate the production of involved, affected, and political subjects?* To begin examining this question, I turn to the literature on the 'aesthetic turn' in politics and international relations.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

By focusing on these zones of the body—the penis, the arms, the limbs, the breasts, the mouth, the anus—Hindu right-wing women's language establishes this body—the 'other's' body—that *must* be controlled and disciplined. A body that is vulgar, sexually aggressive, and uncontrollable on its own *must* be tamed by violence if necessary. A body that fragments, cuts, dismembers, and mutilates (the nation and the woman) and a body that inserts (through rape and rabidity), ruining the pious land with its excesses becomes central to the language of violence. The Hindu right-wing woman through her imagery and language necessitates violence to domesticate the "queer bodies of rage, lust, defecation, and secretion" (Ghosh, 2002:270).

The Arab man's sexual excesses and his *unruly* body occupy a similar place in the language of violence of the Zionist settler women's politics. In the narrative in *Chapter Two* that introduced the outpost-settlement as the centre of the activities of Women in Green, my interlocutor Sarai remarked that the space when 're-claimed' by Zionists was filled with excreta of the 'Arabs' and wild plants and weeds. The women *cleaned up* the site, their love, devotion, and nurturing ways being the fitting Zionist response to the excesses of the *unruly* Arab and his neglect.<sup>519</sup> Sarai added,

Love and nurture for the land is needed, that is why we cleaned it up. But the larger issue is that these Arabs are uncontrollable. They do what they want, where they want. And they don't care about the land—they shit on the land—and while we can clean the land, to stop them we have to go beyond love and devotion; we have to go to anger and hate.<sup>520</sup>

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<sup>519</sup> Conversation with Sarai, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 11 August 2014.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid.

Bleiker (2009:2) defines aesthetics as the “ability to step back, reflect, and see political conflict and dilemmas in new ways”. Aesthetics, therefore, not only refer to forms and practices of art—visual, textual, or oral—but also to the insights, reflective understandings, and political conversations they allow (Bleiker, 2009:2). Questions on aesthetics have been long addressed in various foundational works that have engaged with visual and textual sources and practices to debate ideas on meaning and politics (Kant 2009; Gramsci 1985; Adorno 2007; Rancière 2006). In the last decade, several scholars have examined aesthetic sources (from fiction to narrative to images and art to film to popular culture) in an effort to interrogate the larger questions on art and politics.<sup>123</sup> Offering “alternative insights into international relations and a more open-ended level of sensibility about the political”, works emerging within the ‘aesthetic turn’ allow scholars to question the disciplinary boundaries and inherent assumptions of international politics in interesting as well as challenging ways (Bleiker, 2009:2).

More relevant to this thesis, the ‘aesthetic turn’ has influenced the study of violence and gender with scholars not only examining aesthetic sources related to violence, war, and conflict, but also questioning the unique insights and understandings these sources offer (Sylvester, 2003; Moore, 2006; Shepherd, 2008). However there remains a silence in these works with regards to the aesthetic material produced and appropriated by female perpetrators and enablers of everyday violence such as my interlocutors. With this section, I, thus, address this silence and add to this body of literature on aesthetic international relations, drawing on its epistemological, theoretical, and methodological strengths. Appending to my earlier question on the content of right-wing women’s pedagogy, I ask – *Where do I locate the content of right-wing*

<sup>123</sup> For example, see – Shapiro, 1999, 2008; Weber, 2005a, 2005b; Holden, 2006; Bleiker, 2009; Danchev, 2009; Sylvester, 2008

So while the Arab man’s *mess* can be cleaned up to protect and love the land, his *unruly* body *must* be stopped with violence and anger. Zionist women’s language of everyday violence refocuses on this body of the Arab male who not only defecates on the Jewish land but also, like in the case of the Hindu-right wing’s construction of the Muslim male, *wants* to pillage and rape its women. Focusing on constructed narratives of Arab men who are violent, sexual predators, uncontrollably lustful, and cunning enough to try and trick Jewish women into love and marriage;<sup>521</sup> Women in Green’s leaders and spokeswomen embrace a language that does two things. First, like Rithambara’s language, it focuses on “queer bodies of rage, lust, defecation, and secretion” (Ghosh, 2002:270). Second, it *necessitates* violence as a response to protect oneself from these unruly bodies and to ‘un-queer’ these bodies for good.

Interestingly, this language of violence constructs the ‘unruly’ male ‘other’ subject (and the normative ‘self’) in two more ways. First, it brings in metaphors from the animal kingdom to make its claims. Second, every now and then, while emphasizing the danger of this unruly rapist body, these speech-acts by right-wing women simultaneously mock the male ‘other’ for his perversion, his impotence, his sexual frustration, and his *hermaphrodite* identity.

To elaborate on the first point, let me draw your attention to a sentence on a on post on the website of Women in Green, “*As usual when a dog bites a man it is no news. But when a man bites a dog...it makes the headlines*”.<sup>522</sup> As Nadia elaborated in an interview where I asked her about the language used,

<sup>521</sup> Ibid.

<sup>522</sup> September 15, 2008, *News from the Women in Green*, on the WIG Website - <http://womeningreen.org/news-from-women-in-green/> Accessed 20 July 2014.

*women's pedagogy and how do I examine it? What does it tell me about the worlds and world making of my interlocutors?*

I argue that my questions can be answered by examining the narrative nuances of the textual, visual, and performative content of right-wing women's pedagogy. This content was *found* in the stories and conversation of my interlocutors as well as in their silences. It was also *found* in their imagery, publication, social media presence, materials, and their bodies. Through this content and its ritualistic rendition, my interlocutors, construct what Malkki (1995:55-56) calls "mythico-histories" —processes of "world making" and the "ordering and re-ordering of social and political categories". These "mythico-histories" are constructed carefully and ritualized and rendered in ways that promulgate and sustain their everyday politics and extract affective responses from their audience. This section, thus, locates three sites of aesthetic exploration of right-wing women's pedagogy and politics—prayer; ritualized narratives (verbal, textual, and visual) of fierce women in the Hindu right-wing women's movement; and political performances of Zionist settler women.

### **Prayer as Pedagogy**

An interesting *site* of aesthetic exploration in right-wing women's pedagogy is prayer and its ritualization. As both the Hindu right-wing movement and the Zionist settler project draw on religious elements, prayer enters all realms of women's mobilization and finds a special place in pedagogical events. For Zionist settler women, prayer is exclusively drawn from Jewish religious texts and the ritual of collective praying becomes a means to commence, punctuate, and terminate a pedagogical event. For Hindu right-wing women, prayer is not only gleaned from Hindu religious texts but is also *authored* as an exercise

The post was written after the hue and cry and the fuss when a Jewish man reportedly killed an Arab. I was angry because the government and the NGOs and the human rights mafia ignores when Arabs kill us Jews but they make such a big deal when we defend ourselves. And they kill us much more often than we manage to defend ourselves. And this is what it is. These dogs, and they *are* rabid dogs, they bite us all the time—but who cares right? Dogs are always biting humans—so it is not the news. But when a man bites a dog, of course it becomes news. No one asks why, no one asks but what about the dogs who have bitten men; people only care because a man bit a dog and that too a rabid dog who was going to infect us.<sup>523</sup>

Nadia's post and her subsequent words establish two things—the Arab other as an *unruly animal* body willing and ready to *infect* Jewish life with its infections and bites; *and* the mundane and prolific nature of these "dog bites". Both of these *necessitate* self-defence and violence as means of protections. Across geographies, in India, Rithambara and other Hindu right-wing women also include metaphors of animals in their language. Rithambara when describing Hindu bodies that are victims of violence compares them to cut-up carcasses of cats, rabbits, and frogs—all small, *tame*, and non-dangerous animals. She and other leaders almost always designate Muslim bodies as either dogs and donkeys or flies and mosquitoes. The first establishing their stupidity and rabidity, the second their pest-like nature and their inordinate capacity to breed and proliferate.<sup>524</sup> By using this language, Hindu right-wing women construct the other as *breeding and rabid* (and *stupid*) animal and also draw attention to the *need* for the Hindu man woman to transform herself

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<sup>523</sup> Interview with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 4 September 2014.

<sup>524</sup> CD of Sadhvi Rithambara's Ayodhya Speeches, procured from the RSS publishing shop in Jhandewala, New Delhi, India, 12 February 2014.

in bringing together nationalism, religion, and a feminine discourse of the two.

To elaborate, all Hindu right-wing women's organizations emphasize on the importance of *samskaras* (values) as means of building character. The three *samskaras* that are seen as crucial to Hindu women's learning are *matrutva* (enlightened motherhood), *netrutva* (ideal leadership), and *kartutva* (dutiful efficiency).<sup>124</sup> To impart these three values, *shakhas* (branches) and training camps of the *Samiti* and the *Durga Vahini* carry out pedagogical sessions and events that focus on *bauddhik* (intellectual) training that focuses on developing a "strong mind, communication skills, and self-confidence".<sup>125</sup> These events (ranging from lectures to workshops) contain the ritual of prayer in two ways.

First, intellectual sessions begin and end with a short prayer that can just be the collective chanting of the word *Om* a few times or the reading of a brief verse from a holy book. Prayer from religious scripture thus becomes the ritual that not only brings the room together but also signals the commencement and end of *intellectual time* and a pedagogical event. Second, once the audience's attention has been grabbed, a prayer to *Bharat Mata* (the Mother Goddess) that has been specifically written by Hindu right-wing women leaders is then *performed* in a ritual ceremony. The Goddess, perched on a lion/tiger, represented cartographically—her body covering the entire Indian subcontinent—is worshipped as a pedagogical exercise in itself as she is said to carry *all* the teachings Hindutva women need to live pure individual and collective lives (Ramaswamy, 2010). Although her image is common throughout the movement (and in other ideological movements as well),

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<sup>124</sup> See the website of the *Samiti* for more details on these *samskaras* (values) – <http://rashtrasevikasamiti.org/>

<sup>125</sup> Brochure of the *Durga Vahini*, procured in Mumbai on September 30, 2013.

from a cute cut-up cat carcass to a ferocious lion who cannot be attacked by these 'Muslim pests'.

To elaborate on the second point, I draw on work by Puar (2006) and Manchanda (2015). The Muslim man, while being constructed as a dangerous enemy, is simultaneously mocked as a pervert, who is sexually frustrated, impotent, and a hermaphrodite. In July 2016, as I was writing and editing this chapter, a news item from *Kiryat Arba* in the WIG mailing list caught my attention. A thirteen-year-old girl, the daughter of a prominent settler family in the settlement<sup>525</sup>, had been killed by a young Palestinian man while asleep in her bedroom. Two photographs of the girl's bedroom always accompanied reports of the killing in the WIG mailing list. The first, before the killing, depicting a clean and pink bedroom, with pink fluffy bed-sheets, bunk beds, toys, dolls, pink walls, and a *childlike* aura. The second, after the killing, depicted the same pink bedroom covered with blood.<sup>526</sup> The images and the text insinuating, over and over, that this was *a young girl*, rather *a young girl-child's, room* and the murder of a thirteen year old in her bed could only imply that the killer was not only an Arab man who hated Jews but was also a *pervert*—a sick and twisted sexually perverse paedophile—who killed a young and barely pubescent pink-loving girl.

These narratives of the Arab and Muslim other as a *deviant* man who had no control over his desires and would not only rape the Jewish and Hindu women but routinely engaged in bestiality, paedophilia, sodomy, and all kinds of practices that are designated perverse are rampant in both movements. Stories of Arab/Muslim men fucking goats, cows, dogs, and other *small and defenceless* animals, abusing children, holding hands, kissing each

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<sup>525</sup> One that I had not interviewed but had been acquainted with in the offing.

<sup>526</sup> Entry in the WIG Private Google Group Mailing List dated 4 July 2016.

women *author* this ode to *Bharat Mata*, specifically combining elements of religion and nationalism and imposing them onto this powerful female figure. Bharat Mata's image is placed at the front of the room and women attendees stand in attention to read the prayer in unison.<sup>126</sup> It should also be noted that this prayer has several vernacular versions in different Indian dialects and languages. A translation from Hindi and Marathi, rendered by my interlocutor Sumedha reads:

O, Motherland, you are a sacred land for us. We, your daughters brought up and cultured by you, are offering our respects to you. We are the daughters of *Bharat Mata*. Our minds are to be refined to the maximum extent. *Bharat Mata's* history, philosophy, literature, arts and culture enrich our mind and intellect. We are not common human beings indulging in selfish affairs. The divine touch of *Bharat Mata* has enlightened our lives. It is She who has given us the Path to enable us to lead a gratified life. Her progeny has set an example, through their lives that life is a *Sadhana*, a path of penance and duty, which teaches us that we are not sent here for material enjoyment. Such daughters of yours, who are all miniature version of you are here, worshipping you.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 10 May 2014.

<sup>127</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 10 May 2014.

other on the cheek, engaging in *sodomy*, wearing make-up and heels, abusing *their* women and beating their wives and mothers, and being *less-than* sexually competent beings are repeated in all sorts of variations.<sup>527</sup> These perversions allow the right-wing woman to elevate *her man* and *his* values and sexual prowess while simultaneously designate the 'other's men' to a dangerous and uncontrollable being. The Arab/Muslim man is both—a violent man and a perverted man—the latter, merely strengthening the first. As my urban interlocutor Indira said rather explicitly in an interview,

These *cut-mullahs* (circumcised Muslim men) they have small dicks that don't even function properly. First they are just not satisfied only; they keep marrying women and then they are not satisfied with women—they need more, something disgusting to keep them going. I know they all meet and have orgies. If they can be like this on a daily basis, can you imagine what they will do if they get their hands on Hindu girls? And *hai bhagwaan* (dear God) if they dupe us and we get married to them, can you imagine the life? You sit at home in a burkha and he goes out and fucks cows and other guys.<sup>528</sup>

In her work on how 'Western' discourses construct and mediate the identity and sexuality of the Taliban and Pashtun man, Manchanda (2015) remarks that the homo-sociality, the religious and 'conservative' context, the sex-segregation, allow these discourses to construct the Afghan man as one that holds and acts on unnatural and abnormal desires and excesses. The Pashtun other is thus, on one hand, a queer *unruly* animal whose excesses contain the capacity for remarkable violence and terror, and on the other hand, these very excesses construct him into an effeminate man—a less than masculine yet (and hence) dangerous man. Puar (2006), writing about homonormativity in

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<sup>527</sup> Fieldnotes, London, UK, 8 November 2014.

<sup>528</sup> Interview with Indira, Mumbai, India, 1 November 2013.



**Figure 3.1: The cartographic visual representation of Bharat Mata (Mother Goddess) on a pin/brooch<sup>128</sup>**

For both—Hindu right-wing and Zionist settler women—prayer rituals embody the linking of “mythico-histories” with *concrete* pedagogical exercises (Malkki, 1995:55-56). They also attend to the body as a symbolic site of rituals, embodying the moral *and* intellectual subject who feels close to the divine *as well as* to other/fellow subjects (Corwin, 2012:396; Wilcox, 2015a, 2015b). Prayer, thus, ritualized in certain ways, becomes a site of both disciplining a session and its attendees and embodied unison (Burack, 2014; Mahmood, 2005). Furthermore, prayer in a pedagogical setting serves three additional purposes.

First, prayer, occasionally, transforms into the content of a pedagogical section where women discuss and deconstruct it. In the case of Hindu right-wing women, my interlocutors also *pen* it together. Second, for Zionist settler women, prayer also becomes a practice through which my interlocutors

<sup>128</sup> The Pin/Brooch (for clothes/bags) was purchased from the Hindu Nationalist Shop in Jhandewala, Delhi, India on 12 February 2014. Photograph taken by author on 23 July 2015.

the US examines the discursive construction of the ‘terrorist’ by the ‘West’. Arguing that bin Laden was racialized and sexualized through imagery and writing, she states that “negative connotations of homosexuality were used to racialize and sexualize Osama bin Laden: feminized, stateless, dark, perverse, paedophilic, disowned by family, i.e. fag” (Puar, 2006:70-71). While Manchanda and Puar’s work focuses on these constructions of a perverse queer-ness juxtaposed alongside a homonormative, i.e. an acceptable ‘Western’ LGBT identity; right-wing women adopt the same language and connotations to establish the duality of the (hetero) normative Hindu/Jewish woman who fights in self-defence and the queer and *unruly* Muslim/Arab male who must be stopped. The discursive construction of the ‘other’ and the subsequent justification for everyday violence by the right-wing women relies on knowledge of sexual perversity and queer monstrosity, i.e. violence is needed so we can stay safe from the “Monster, Terrorist, Fag” (Puar & Rai, 2002). With reference to the ‘Western’ and popular narratives of perversion that Manchanda and Puar contest in their work, Paul Amar (2011:40) highlights that,

These public-discourse versions of masculinity studies and everyday etiologies of racialized Middle Eastern [and South Asian] maleness operate as some of the primary public tools for analysing political change and social conflict in the region.

With the Hindu right-wing women and the Zionist settler women, these public discourses led by women similarly (and equally dangerously) operate as the primary tools for analysing the ‘other’ and shaping a response—personal, political, policy—to the ‘other’.

While the bulk of the discourse of my right-wing women interlocutors focuses on the Muslim/Arab male other and his *unruly* body as a threat to Hindu/Jewish normativity and purity, I want to (briefly) mention the *absent*



constitute themselves as national-religious subjects, demarcating themselves from “left-wing Israelis who do not pray at all” and ultra-orthodox women “who pray all the time and do nothing else”.<sup>129</sup> Third, pedagogical sessions involving prayer are occasionally held at contested religious sites. For example, Hindu right-wing women *take-back* Muslim spaces of worship by conducting educational sessions with religious elements *in* or *near* them;<sup>130</sup> and Zionist settler women conduct pedagogical events with ritualistic religious elements at sites such as the Temple Mount of the Ibrahimi Mosque/Cave of the Patriarchs (Margalit, 2014). Prayer, here, not only mediates the production of unified and affective subjects, but also facilitates spatialized political violence and control.

### **The Fierce and Warrior Feminine: Stories and Images of Hindu Right-Wing Women’s Pedagogy**

The previous subsection mentioned *Bharat Mata* as a key figure in the iconography of Hindu right-wing women’s pedagogy. This subsection will take that discussion further and examine other figures—from mythology and history—that have been appropriated and *created* to formulate my interlocutors’ visual, textual, and oral narratives.<sup>131</sup> The narratives encircling these figures are ritualized in women’s pedagogical spaces; their ritualized recitation rendering them as “invented traditions” that provide Hindu right-wing women a “continuity with the historical past” (Hobsbawm, 1983:1-2). Furthermore, these narratives also allow my interlocutors with the means to

<sup>129</sup> Conversation with Nili, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 5 September 2014.

<sup>130</sup> An act that is reminiscent of the ‘claiming’ of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya as a Hindu temple with the use of idols and worship alongside violence and destruction. See - Hansen (1999).

<sup>131</sup> It must be noted that Hindu right-wing women use scores of such figures in their imagery and stories. These figures (and their details) vary with location within the country. This thesis cannot delve into *all* these figures and doesn’t promise an exhaustive discussion here. Instead, I focus on the major figures that are present across the country and were particularly popular with my set of interlocutors.

Muslim/Arab woman in this language. In both movements, women’s language and narratives dominantly (if not only) mention the female ‘other’ in two ways. First, much like ‘Western’ discourse of the war on terror, the Muslim/Arab woman is constructed as the ‘veiled subject/slave’ in need of “rescuing” (Abu-Lughod, 2002). As my Hindu right-wing interlocutor Radhika asserted when asked her opinion of Muslim women in India,

Those poor things. I feel terrible for them. Look at them. Covered from head to toe. Their sad eyes peering out of those horrible burkhas. They must feel so hot in this weather. They must feel so confined, so claustrophobic. They have to share their husband with other women. I really really feel bad for them. I want to help them.<sup>529</sup>

Second, the Muslim/Arab woman when not being pitied is constructed as promiscuous and vile prostitute who “enjoys her perverted man”. As Sarai once spoke,

Sometimes I look at these Arab women with their husbands and think surely they can run away and come towards us. They are smiling at their husbands. If they do that they must be happy with them—happy with these pervs—they must be sexually perverted too, like hookers.<sup>530</sup>

The ‘rescue’ narrative allows right-wing women to once again justify their violence and aggressive actions. They are not only physically hurting and stopping the Muslim man but are also *saving* and *empowering* oppressed women. The ‘rescue’ narrative also allows right-wing women to campaign for larger political and religious issues in the name of gender equality. For instance, in a famous legal and political battle in the 1970s and 80s, Hindu right-wing women actively supported Muslim widow Shah Bano who had been divorced by her husband and left without alimony. Their actions

<sup>529</sup> Interview with Radhika, Mumbai, India, 3 November 2013.

<sup>530</sup> Conversation with Sarai, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 14 September 2014.

place themselves in an “imagined past” that connects them as individuals and as a collective with their contemporary political fights for the ‘Hindu’ nation (Anderson, 2006). This subsection will thus *do* two things: First, it will examine the transformations in the mythological pedagogical iconography of Hindu right-wing women. Here, I argue that my interlocutors have fashioned new ‘feminine’ discourses that construct them as warrior protectors of the Hindu nation. Second, it will elaborate on story-telling rituals in Hindu right-wing women’s pedagogical narratives. Here, I argue that story-telling and its ritual deliverance rely on blurring temporal boundaries—mixing the past and the present—to produce my interlocutors as subjects who are empowered and agential political women.

To elaborate on the first, I would like to revisit the genealogy of women’s participation in the Hindu right-wing project, albeit from the perspective of the visual. In the early decades of the project (1930-60s), the Hindu woman’s body mainly functioned as a symbolic marker for a male-formulated discourse. Women were portrayed as weak, defenceless, and chaste, always at the risk of rape and *invasion* by the Muslim ‘other’ (Sarkar, 1999). Women’s discourses imbibed this portrayal, with their pedagogical iconography drawing on the Hindu Goddess *Sita*—the loyal wife from the epic Ramayana, who accompanies her husband, Rama, into fourteen years of exile (Sethi, 2002; Mehta, 2015). During their years in the forest, Sita was kidnapped by Raavana, the evil ‘other’ and was *rescued* by her husband and his allies. Upon return to their kingdom, a pregnant Sita had to submit herself to a test of purity—a trial by fire—from which she emerged alive and was yet *banished* into exile. She raised her twins by herself and sought final refuge in the arms of her mother *Bhumi*, the Hindu Goddess representing the earth. Sita, thus, embodied the Hindu right-wing woman of these decades—a dutiful wife, an honourable mother, and a vulnerable figure that allowed for a pedagogy that

disguised in this language of *saving* the oppressed Muslim woman were actually an attempt to abolish the Muslim Personal Status Codes in India and enforce uniform civil law (so that “*Muslims were no longer given preferential treatment*”).<sup>531</sup>

The ‘prostitute’ narrative demonizes the Muslim/Arab woman and justifies acts of violence against her. In a horrifying and chilling conversation with Bina, an old Hindu right-wing activist who proudly boasts about committing violence against Muslims in the 1992 communal riots in Mumbai, she states,

Prostitutes deserved to be raped. I harmed a lot of Muslims—I threw things at them, lit their homes on fire, I slapped their men. There were lots of men who raped and sexually taunted some Muslim girls and women—and why shouldn’t they? These women are perverted, they are prostitutes, *randis* (whores), what else do they deserve?<sup>532</sup>

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I’d like to move away from the horrific contents of the aforementioned quote and offer a quick interlude. Ironically, absences as well as the liberal feminist constructions of the right-wing woman as a subject/slave/pawn of patriarchy with limited agency (who needed to be stopped, ignored, or *rescued*) drew me to this research project. Mahmood’s (2005) work on the need to re-make subjects whose agency and mobilization might differ from ‘liberal’ notions of empowerment and freedom provided the intellectual groundwork that pushed this project. Little did I realize that my right-wing interlocutors would espouse similar frameworks of subject formation for the women of the ‘other’;

<sup>531</sup> For a history of this movement and the legal battle over the Muslim personal code that preceded it, see – Engineer, A. (1987). *The Shah Bano Controversy*. Bombay: Stosius Inc/Advent Books Division.

<sup>532</sup> Conversation with Bina, Mumbai, India, January 16 2014.



demonized the 'other' and empowered the Hindu male *rescuer/protector* (See Figures 3.2 and 3.3).



Figure 3.2: The Goddess Sita portrayed as the ideal wife and mother<sup>132</sup>



Figure 3.3: The defenceless Sita being attacked by the evil 'other' Raavana<sup>133</sup>

In the 1980s and 1990s, as the Hindu right-wing project gained momentum, women emerged as powerful actors, taking to the streets, engaging in

<sup>132</sup> Photograph taken by author on 15 December 2013 of a booklet circulated by the *Samiti* at a Hindu Right-Wing event in Dadar, Mumbai, India.

<sup>133</sup> Photograph taken by author on 15 December 2013 of a booklet circulated by the *Samiti* at a Hindu Right-Wing event in Dadar, Mumbai, India.

frameworks that, in this case, were not only limiting and horrendously shallow but also downright dangerous.

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I have elaborated on the construction and mediation of the queer *unruly* body of the other, the threat this body poses to the normativity and security of the Jewish and Hindu land, and the violence that these narratives of excess demand and enable; I am now interested in how this language of violence and sex *queers* the right-wing woman herself.

Laclau and Mouffe (2001) note that language and discourse imbibe meaning from a "system of differences" that contains the relational nature of identities and subjectivities. Thus one identity is only constructed through the inclusion/exclusion of the other. As the right-wing woman busily re-makes the subjectivities of the 'other', she co-constitutes herself as a subject who is the violent defender of the nation. Interestingly, while she uses *queer* language to establish a discursive chain of equivalence that arrests the meanings of signifiers, she also, simultaneously, re-configures and co-constitutes herself as a queer subject. Drawing on Ghosh (2002), I argue that as the Hindu right-wing woman stands in front of a crowd (or a meeting or even her household and close friends), speaking with rage and fury of the Muslim man's pleasures, perversions, secretions, and insertions, she herself becomes a 'queer' body inciting violence. This feminine body speaking in a *forbidden* language, harping on bodily desires and pleasures (even if in a derogatory manner), exhibiting emotions and affective gestures that evoke and provoke, stands in opposition to the disciplined, domesticated, and normative body of the pure, chaste, and traditional Hindu and Zionist woman (Foucault, 1990). In both movements the sexed and de-sexed bodies of right-wing women activists thus stand in tension alongside the normative ideals of femininity as

violence, and transforming themselves from victim-bodies into *viranganas* (brave women) and *ranchandis* (warrior Goddesses) (Sethi, 2002). Interestingly, as women's roles transformed, so did their pedagogical iconography. Imagery of *Sita* was pushed to the background and *fierce* Goddesses were chosen to portray the warrior Hindu right-wing woman who not only engaged in *bauddhik* (intellectual) learning but also in *sharirik* (physical) lessons (Bacchetta, 2004; Mehta, 2015). The two *fierce* Goddesses that formed the bulk of my interlocutors' *new* iconography (and continue to do so) were *Durga* and *Kali*.

*Durga*, after whom the organization *Durga Vahini* (The Army of Durga) is named, is depicted in visual narratives as having ten arms, carrying weapons, sitting on a lion or tiger, maintaining a meditative smile and practicing *mudras* (symbolic hand gestures). Her imagery is repeated throughout pedagogical events (See Figure 3.4) and my interlocutors Pooja and Priya's words signify her importance,

*Durga* was created from the energies of the Gods. She is powerful and exists in a state of self-sufficiency and independence. She can kill demons easily but is also compassionate with a sense of justice.<sup>134</sup>

*Kali* is depicted with four hands—holding a sword, a trident, a severed human head, and a skull—while wearing a necklace of skulls around her neck (See Figure 3.5). Her images illustrate her demon-slaying capabilities, rendering her an inspiration to warrior Hindu womanhood. However, her violent imagery is often softened with the accompaniment of visuals of her breastfeeding babies (See Figure 3.6). It is also interesting to mention these images of *Kali* are accompanied by stories in which *Kali* encounters crying

<sup>134</sup> Interview with Pooja and Priya, Pune, India, 11 April 2014.

put forth by the male-formulated ideologies and larger patriarchal discourses of the movements. They also stand in tension with the conceptualization of the motherland—of *Bharat Mata*, the mother Goddess, cartographic yet feminine and whole and of the land of *Eretz Yisrael* in its feminine docility and purity.

Women's language of violence thus *queers* them and becomes a site of male-female tensions and contradictions in these movements. I will elaborate more on how violence (discursive and physical) becomes a point of disagreement and dispute between men and women in these projects in *Section 6.4*. But for now, going further in, I want to briefly discuss how this language of violence dislodges hegemonic conceptions of masculinities and femininities within right-wing women's organizations.

Speaking to hundreds of thousands of people at a rally in Ayodhya in 1992, Sadhvi Rithambara, making a direct reference to a 'terrorist' *Shahabuddin*, thundered, "*If Shahabuddin has drunk his mother's milk, I have also drunk my mother's milk*".<sup>533</sup> Her words insisting that daughters drink from the same breasts that sons do and thereby are as ferocious<sup>534</sup> dislodges the very gendered logic of cultural nationalism where women's roles are restricted to their wombs and honour. Women activists of the Hindu right-wing (in their own words) often adopt a 'masculinized' language, appearance, and outlook that they justify as means to carry out their work for the nation as effectively as possible. As my interlocutor Divya once remarked,

<sup>533</sup> CD of Sadhvi Rithambara's Ayodhya Speeches, procured from the RSS publishing shop in Jhandewala, New Delhi, India, 12 February 2014.

<sup>534</sup> Not drinking breast milk is often used as an insult for men to mean emasculation and effeminisation especially in the dialogues of popular Bollywood movies. They take the shape of sentences such as - *maan ka doodh piya hai to saamne aa!* (if you have drunk your mother's milk, come forward and fight!)

babies near the battlefield and proceeds to calm them by putting them to her breast, while demon-blood still drips from her mouth (Bacchetta, 2004; Mehta, 2015).

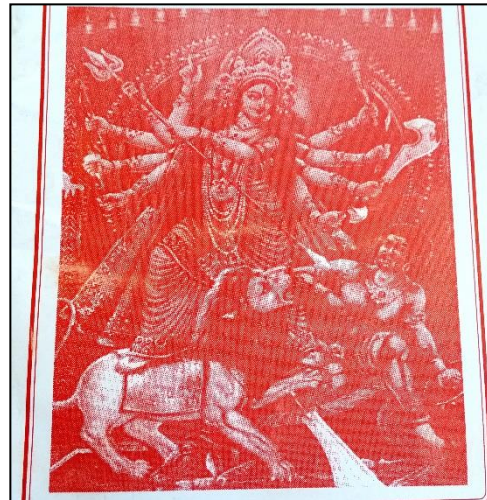


Figure 3.4: Durga, the fierce Goddess<sup>135</sup>

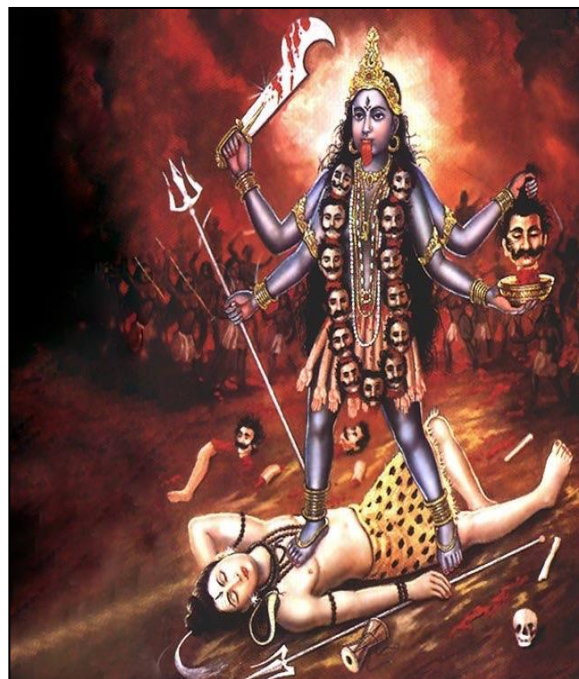


Figure3.5: The warrior Goddess Kali<sup>136</sup>

<sup>135</sup> Photograph taken by author on 1 May 2014 of the cover page of a book circulated by the Durga Vahini – Konkan Province, Durga Vahini History, Pune: VHP Press.

<sup>136</sup> Photograph taken by author on 26 February 2014 of a calendar found in the home of a Durga Vahini member.

I wear jogging or running shoes with my clothes because later I have to go to the shakha (branch) and then we have to do exercises and I have to run around so much. It is not too girly but you know it is practical.<sup>535</sup>

Thus the Hindu right-wing woman's body and materiality of this body—her clothes, her accessories, her hair—become sites where these binaries of masculinities/femininities and practicalities/emotions collide to construct subjects that are queer and non-normative. This queering of the self through language and related acts is perhaps most visible in the words of Prachi, the protagonist of Nisha Pahuja's excellent documentary on the Hindu right-wing – *The World Before Her*.<sup>536</sup> Prachi, one of the leaders of a training camp for young girls struggles with the norms of femininity. Despising idle talk, gossip, make-up, feminine clothes, female activities and the larger expectations of marriage, children, and family, she juggles between espousing a language and body that is riddled with anger, rage, violence, and masculinity and the anxieties from the obligations of her biological sex. "Perplexed by gendered norms, in a delightfully queer moment in the film, she laments that she is neither a girl nor a boy and she simply does not know how to be either" (Mehta, 2016:141). Her personal tensions and contradictions around gender and sexuality pointing to the larger political ones for the movement itself.<sup>537</sup>

In the case of Zionist women, as religious observance of Judaism involves adhering to a dress code (women are not supposed to wear trousers but only modest skirts), these 'compromises' are even more visible. Nadia, the leader

<sup>535</sup> Conversation with Divya, Mumbai, India, 6 December 2013.

<sup>536</sup> See the website for *The World Before Her*, a documentary by Nisha Pahuja - <http://www.worldbeforeher.com/>

<sup>537</sup> I also elaborate on this in my review of *The World Before Her*, see Mehta (2016) - <https://journals.warwick.ac.uk/index.php/feministdissent/article/view/16/30>





Figure 3.6: Kali as a mother<sup>137</sup>

Scholars of visual culture in South Asia have argued that pictures are an integral element of history and politics in the making. There remains a dire need to re-fashion a visual narrative of politics one that focuses on the efficacy of images and considers not what the image *looks like* but what the image *can do* (Pinney, 2004; Jain, 2007; Ramaswamy, 2010). While this thesis does not posit to be a visual history of right-wing women, I do want to make three arguments that showcase what the pedagogical iconography of my interlocutors *enables*.

First, as this *transformed* iconography is ritualized and circulated through educational lessons, it reifies the larger political goals and everyday violence of women in the movement, producing my interlocutors as *warrior women* subjects. As Ritu, a member of the *Durga Vahini* elaborated,

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

of Women in Green, a religious Jew, only wore hiking gear (a comfortable full sleeved t-shirt, cargo trousers, boots, and a cap) as she gave her provocative speeches and carried about her daily work. Standing in contrast with women who embodied normative Jewish femininity and even those who embodied a negotiated femininity (where skirts are combined with t-shirts and leggings and veils and wigs are replaced by sun caps and hats), she always legitimized her appearance by joking about her work. In the middle of a pedagogical event, to a group of visitors (and me) she pointed to her plain white t-shirt and khaki-coloured cargo pants and laughed,

What can I say? I have to dress like this; it matches how I talk. If I am standing here and telling you about how the Arabs are destroying us and how we need to work the land and fight them with all our might, will you take me seriously if I was wearing a flowery skirt or a pink shirt? What if I was wearing make-up? Can I dig this land with manicured nails?<sup>538</sup>

Nadia was not only apologizing for her non-traditional look (and ensuring that the visitors' sentiments are not hurt) in her self-deprecating manner but she also pointed to a valid point—how *do* you dig the land, hurl stones, climb fences, and engage in violence if dressed in traditionally feminine outfits? As Sarai said,

Of course we have to dress the way we do, especially Nadia, we have to do our work. H'Shem will understand.<sup>539</sup>

My interlocutors' arguments mirrored those of young 'tomboyish' girls in playgrounds and toy stores and like viral YouTube videos of these girls demanding 'action figure' toys and resisting frocks and the colour pink; they

<sup>538</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 26 August 2014.

<sup>539</sup> Conversation with Sarai, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 26 August 2014.

We were always told to be good wives and mothers and take inspiration from Hindu Goddesses who were honourable, but now we focus more on the fierce and angry Goddesses who teach us how to fight. When we go to meetings and camps, they have to teach us to use sticks and rifles and train us to be physically fit—we have to wake up every morning and run and become strong—so we need inspiration from warrior goddesses; we look at their pictures and sing songs about them to be inspired.<sup>138</sup>

Second, these images become a site for bargaining with male discourses and male-led politics within the larger movement. Women, often, refer to these mythological characters and their iconography to *convince* the men in the movement for the need and space (and even financial support) for women's physical training. As my interlocutor Rachna asserted,

They [Muslims] spill our blood. They rape our women. They burn our temples and destroy our country. Let their blood spill out... Just as Kali did not spare even one *rakshasa* (demon)... why should we spare them and let them live?<sup>139</sup>

Rachna's words were remarkably (and hauntingly) similar to those of Kamlabehn, an interlocutor Bacchetta's (2004:62-91) work. Like Rachna and Kamlabehn, other interlocutors—especially those heading the camps—also used this iconography to *necessitate* physical training, make *physical* pedagogy enjoyable for the students, and produce alternative feminine discourses within the larger movement.

Third, these *transformed* visuals enable the production of new imagery—*created* by Hindu right-wing women—that appeals to an even wider selection

dislodge normative and hegemonic masculinities and femininities with their language and logic.

Puar (2006:20) draws on Foucault (1990) to speak about “pursued pleasures—bodies, practices, and energies both ‘sought after and searched out’—fascinating pleasures simultaneously abhorred and coveted”. Building on Said (1979), she speaks about the Orient and the ‘other’ as sites and bodies where those in the ‘West’ could obtain these pleasures (Puar, 2006:20). I'd like to offer a nascent argument here that the “queerphobic xenophobia and xenophobic queerphobia” that constitutes the right-wing woman's language of violence contains desires and pleasures that lie in the ‘other’ and his way of life (Bacchetta, 2002:143-44). The repression of these desires as well as the obsession with their desires only strengthens the violence unleashed on the ‘other’ by the right-wing woman. Furthermore, in an article titled *Bleurgh!*, O'Rourke (2014:94) asserts the need to voice and maintain that which disgusts us and speak and feel the “erotics of bodily fluids and the ontologically leaky body”. Quoting Chambers and Carver (2008:69) he says, “We might need to talk about bodies, and body parts, in much more direct, precise, perhaps even crude ways” (O'Rourke, 2014:94). While his work aims to push queer and feminist scholars to think beyond the boundaries of their squeamishness, it is worth highlighting that right-wing women are doing *exactly* what O'Rourke demands—speaking, feeling, and living disgust. Whether or not this is a queer or feminist act, is the question then to ask and answer.

I have elaborated in detail on how the language of violence embraced and constructed by right-wing women centre on blood and gore and revolve around the queer and unruly body of the other, offering ways to re-think their subjectivities and politics. Before I conclude this section on language and violence, I'd like to offer two more lenses to examine the same. These

<sup>138</sup> Interview with Ritu, Pune, India, 18 March 2014.

<sup>139</sup> Interview with Rachna, New Delhi, India, 23 January 2014.

of women, facilitating a heightened inclusivity in the movement. To elaborate, I want to explore the figure of *Ashthabhuja*, the eight-armed Goddess that was *constructed* by the founder of the Samiti, Laxmibai Kelkar, and has since become a concrete part of the *Samiti* and the *Durga Vahini's* pedagogical sessions (See Figure 3.7). *Ashthabhuja* is weapon wielding and she symbolizes the assimilation of three goddesses—*Laxmi* (the Goddess of Wealth), *Durga* (the Goddess of Power), and *Saraswati* (the Goddess of Education). She carries objects in her eight hands, and represents the coordination of strength, intellect, and wealth (Mehta, 2015). What is interesting is that each arm of *Ashthabhuja* represents a different virtue (ranging from patience to aggression to intellect to science) that allows her to take on various personal-political forms and making her more appealing to all kinds of women with different abilities, different positionalities of caste, class, and location and different roles in the movement (Sarkar & Butalia, 1998). As my interlocutor Jaya elaborated,

We feel that *Ashthabhuja* has many different and yet all important characteristics. So, women from different backgrounds, different education systems and levels, and even different temperaments can still identify with one or more of her virtues. And then when they hear stories about her actions, her heroism, and her commitment to the Hindu nation, they can each feel like they are her, no matter how different they might be.<sup>140</sup>

The *creation* of this Goddess, thus, signals the remarkable potential of ritualized visual iconography. Alongside other visuals I have presented, it particularly indicates the strategic thought and praxis of Hindu right-wing women. Before I move on to the second argument in this subsection, I find it pertinent to mention that although these visuals pervade pedagogical

<sup>140</sup> Interview with Jaya, New Delhi, India, 16 February 2014.

include—the use of mythology and domesticity to necessitate violence and the use of ‘historical’ political events; and a trendy language that speaks to neoliberalism to frame and further violence.

### **The Goddesses and the Kitchen: Mythology and Domesticity**

In *Chapter Three*, I elaborated on pedagogy as a site and practice through which right-wing women locate agency and space within their movements. While speaking about Hindu right-wing women, I detailed the use of both—mythological and historical—feminine figures that were used to justify violent acts, training in violence, as well as women’s everyday roles in the movement. I’d like to revisit this as well as bring up the use of domestic metaphors in the language of violence. As women in the Hindu right-wing call to armed (and multi-armed) Goddesses like *Kali* and *Durga* that killed demons with their bare hands and weapons, they establish the Muslim as a demon through and themselves as fierce Goddesses who must fight with veracity through a visual and textual chain of equivalences (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). The presence of these mythological figures in the ‘everyday’ establishes the routine nature of this language of violence. Taking this further, I’d like to present a quote from a speech by Sadhvi Rithambara in November 1992. Standing in front of a large crowd, Rithambara roared,

In our nations, Muslims, like a pinch of sugar should sweeten a glass of milk. Instead, like lemon, they sour it. What they do not realize is that a squeezed lemon is thrown away while the milk that has been curdled solidifies into *paneer* (cottage cheese). So Muslims have two choices in this nation, either to live like sugar or like wrung lemons.<sup>540</sup>

By speaking of Muslims and Hindus with metaphors of lemons, sugar, and cottage cheese and by linking these identifiable substances to visuals of

<sup>540</sup> CD of Sadhvi Rithambara’s *Ayodhya Speeches*, procured from the RSS publishing shop in Jhandewala, New Delhi, India, 12 February 2014.

practices, they *also* find other functions as symbols, especially on publicity and marketing materials for the organizations.



Figure 3.7: Ashthabhuja, the eight-armed Goddess<sup>141</sup>

The afore-presented visuals of *fierce* goddesses allow Hindu right-wing women to fashion themselves as violent warrior subjects. I now assert that rituals of story-telling in pedagogical sessions accompany this iconography, furthering my interlocutors' processes of *world making* by providing them with a "gendered vision of the past" (Menon, 2005:105). This vision contains figures of *brave* historical women who are then juxtaposed with Hindu right-wing's contemporary women leaders and my interlocutors themselves.

<sup>141</sup> Photograph taken by author on 10 December 2012 of a pamphlet produced by the *Samiti* and distributed at weekly meetings.

wringing, curdling, sweetening, souring, and discarding, Hindu right-wing women like Rithambara adopt a (queer) language of violence that instrumentalizes domesticity to bring the political to the kitchen and the kitchen to the political. Both establish larger hierarchies of Hindu and Muslim, peace and violence, as well as the roles of women as fighters and warriors. As Sadhvi Prachi in her provocative speech screams,

They say you will obtain peace if you sit with beads and meditate. They say we got freedom by non-violence. But really, did Rama just sit there spinning cloth and giving Raavana khadi<sup>541</sup> to get Sita back?<sup>542</sup> He only got mother Sita back by fighting, by picking up his bow and arrow. Hindus, you can only remove terror from this country by becoming Rama and picking up your weapons. Get ready. You have to get ready. Now. Bharat Mata has spread her arms, waiting for you. Krishna from the Mahabharata blew the conch to begin fighting. He did not only blow the flute. The conch will wake everyone and get us to fight and once it does that, then pick up the flute. First pick up the bow and arrow to kill Raavana and only then pick up Krishna's flute. Once you do that then Bharat Mata will embrace you and give you milk and tulsi (holy basil) to cure your pure bodies.<sup>543</sup>

In this one continuous narrative, Prachi speaks a language of violence that invokes both of the above—mythology and domesticity. Interestingly, Hindu right-wing women, in an effort to garner support from other 'compatible' South Asian communities (like the Sikhs, Jains, and Parsis) invoke their mythology and a shared history in their language. Sikh warrior heroines are

<sup>541</sup> Hand-spun cloth from South Asia made popular by Gandhi as an anti-colonial act.

<sup>542</sup> In the Hindu epic Ramayana, Lord Rama's wife Sita is kidnapped by Raavana, the evil ruler of Lanka.

<sup>543</sup> Watch the speech by Sadhvi Prachi on the YouTube Channel of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3RZKWzPJDo>

To elaborate, my interlocutors' pedagogical literature is filled with stories about *key* historical figures—ranging from *Rani Laxmibai* (the Queen of Jhansi)<sup>142</sup> to *Jijabai* (the mother of Maratha ruler, Shivaji)<sup>143</sup> —as well as narratives of Hindu right-wing women leaders and contemporaries. These stories are narrated in educational sessions, repeated by both teachers and students. They are also dramatized and performed as well as published in various books and pamphlets. These stories become “mythico-histories” that enable the production of the subject who can link the past to the present and draw inspiration from these narrations to re-order contemporary social and political categories (Malkki, 1995:55-56).

I'd like to detail this further by examining one particular figure—*Jijabai*. Treated by the male-formulated discourse as the preeminent mother of a warrior son, *Jijabai* finds a different space in women's narratives. She is not solely glorified as a mother, but instead is depicted as a strategic political thinker and warrior in images and stories. Embodying the source of her warrior son's physical, intellectual, and political strength, *Jijabai* is illustrated as a larger than life figure, looming over *Shivaji*, her right arm often outstretched, her index finger pointing outwards, directing (and even commanding) her son to look in the direction of the Hindu nation. Her son often depicted as folding his hands or sitting in front of her, marking her strategic superiority and status (See Figure 3.8).

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<sup>142</sup> The Queen of Jhansi, Laxmibai, was one of the leading figures of the Indian Rebellion of 1857, and a symbol of resistance to British rule in India. It is said that she fought the battle with her child strapped to her back.

<sup>143</sup> Shivaji, a revered figure in Hindutva ideology, led an alleged 'resistance' to free the Maratha nation from Sultanate of Bijapur, and establish self-rule. He created an independent Maratha kingdom and fought against the (Muslim) Mughals to defend his kingdom successfully.

revered and while Muslims are constructed akin to wrung lemons, Parsis are seen as the sugary 'outsiders' who sweetened the Hindu milk.<sup>544</sup>

As elaborated in *Chapter Three*, Zionist women too evoke mythology and domesticity in their violent language. Both are used as justifications and calls to violence. While figures such as Rachel are evoked as a call to protect and defend the land, mythological and domestic narratives are best used to mourn the loss of land and the sacrifices of the 'pioneers' that then necessitate violence against the Arab other to protect the land of Israel. For example, interlocutors in the settlement of *Kiryat Arba* where I conducted ethnographic fieldwork often referred to two major reasons for 'protecting' themselves and the Zionist settlement by engaging in violence and aggression against the Arabs. The first was the mythological history of the settlement as the holy site (second holiest site in Judaism) of the *Mara'h Machpela* (Cave of the Patriarchs) and the place where the four couples—Abraham and Sarah; Isaac and Rebecca; Jacob and Leah; and Adam and Eve—were buried. The second was references to the “sacrifices that the pioneers who settled Hebron and Kiryat Arba made in order to give us all a home in the holiest place and help us claim our stolen land”.<sup>545</sup> These sacrifices being echoes of the “larger sacrifices of the pioneers and the *sabra* men and women who left everything to settle Israel and make it a Jewish home for so many”.<sup>546</sup> Both these evocations are forms of mourning, meandering between mythology and 'home' that are expressed through a language and discourse that justifies the everyday violence of right-wing women.

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<sup>544</sup> Fieldnotes, London, UK, 25 October 2014.

<sup>545</sup> Conversation with Sarai, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 14 September 2014.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid.





Figure 3.8: Depictions of Jijabai and her son Shivaji<sup>144</sup>

In a weekly pedagogical session in Mumbai, I listened to the telling of a particular story about *Jijabai* that often accompanied this visual (and was also published and narrated regularly). My interlocutors asserted that the story was immensely popular; it was re-told and ritualized in various locations. The story goes,

Jijabai, the revered mother of Shivaji, saw many atrocities being committed by Muslim invaders ever since she was a child. She saw Hindu women screaming and being abducted and men being tortured and beaten. One day she saw a Muslim man urinating on the wall of a Hindu temple. The young Jijabai, distressed and angry, complained to her family about the man's actions. Her parents told her that the man was Muslim and part of the ruling class and hence no one could do anything about his disgusting and heinous actions. She was very affected by this incident and response and began to question if Hindus

### Old and New: Making Violence Historical and Trendy

Drawing to the last point as I discuss language, I want to highlight that right-wing women's language of violence includes references to both historical and political events (appropriated as necessary). It also moulds itself and transforms itself in accordance to 'trends', popular culture, and neoliberal ideas. Both of these inclusions not only justify the use of violence and necessitate it as something historically and politically significant but also *transform* violence into something 'trendy' and popular that is in line with the rules and aspirations of a globalizing neoliberal society.

In the provocative aforementioned speech, Sadhvi Prachi's call to arms invokes a series of signifiers and then ends with a chronology of political and appropriated historical details. She screams with rage,

Pakistan and Muslims, we are not scared of bombs and missiles; we are scared of peace agreements like Tashkent and Shimla. Just because you have nuclear weapons you think you are great, but you are forgetting the battles of 1965, 1972, and 1999. Indians have burned you and you need to think of the prisoners of war and the kindness that India has mistakenly shown you. Pakistan, open your ears and listen. If there is another war, there will be no trace of you left. Kashmir will remain, but Pakistan will be obliterated. You've drenched the valleys of Srinagar red with blood, poisoning innocents, sending militants, openly engaging in terror. The whole world knows that this is you, Pakistan. Enough! If you don't get your act together, the whole country of Hindus will rise in anger. If the Hindus rise, Pakistan will be ruined. Will your father come to release atom bombs? We will ruin everything from Rawalpindi to Karachi. Islamabad will have the Indian flag fluttering through it. The Ganges will flow through Lahore. We will have a whole Hindustan. Kashmir to hoga lekin Pakistan nahi hoga.

<sup>144</sup> Photograph taken by author on 23 July 2015 of pamphlet called *Veer Matayen* (Brave Mothers) produced and distributed by the *Samiti*.

were ever going to defeat these evil Muslim invaders. She swore that she would work very hard to beat them one day and to establish a pure Hindu nation, where no one could disrespect Hinduism.<sup>145</sup>

*Jijabai*, in this story, was not only a witness to history but was also an agent and an educator. She stood alone “as the visionary who must teach others to respect themselves and fight against Muslim rule” (Menon, 2005:109). She was able to fathom the threats to *Hindu* values and culture and as seen through dozens of other stories and images, she *enabled* a political and warrior movement to counter these threats. The ritualistic telling of these stories about *Jijabai* was often accompanied by long discussions on alleged contemporary *problems* unleashed on the Hindu nation by Muslim communities (ranging from cow slaughter to terrorism to the demographic threat posed by Muslims) as well as Christian communities (from conversions to immorality). They were also supplemented by narratives of two kinds—stories from the lives of Hindu right-wing women leaders such as Kelkar and Sadhvi Rithambara; and personal-political revelations from the women in the sessions. They underlined both the witnessing of atrocity and the threatening presence of the ‘other’ as well as the willingness and ability to fight the ‘other’.

This *movement* between temporalities through story-telling, I argue, enables three processes. First, the personalization of the construction of the past legitimises it, rendering it factual for my interlocutors (Menon, 2005:114). Second, it establishes an alternative discourse of Hindu nationalism, one where *brave* historical women not only supplemented *brave* historical men but also were responsible for the men’s strategy and strength. It then links this

<sup>145</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 20 April 2014.

(Kashmir will stay but Pakistan will not exist.) We will destroy you Pakistan. Hindus, stand up, this is the time to stand. Meat was thrown on your temples. They hit us with stones; we will hit them with iron. We are made of Iron.<sup>547</sup>

Like other Hindu right-wing women who invoke the partition, the wars with Pakistan, Kashmir, and other historical events, Prachi’s words incite violence as they connect the imagined Hindu nation’s present (and its problems) with its past and future (Anderson, 2006). Similarly, in the Zionist settler movement, the history and politics of Israel (from the Six-Day War to the Oslo Accords to other “attacks from Gaza”) are continuously included in the language of violence espoused by the Zionist women. Perhaps, most befitting, is the example of the very name of Women in Green—a response to the aftermath of the Oslo Accords—where Nadia and Ruth stood at the “Green Line” wearing green clothes and green hats in protest of this line that “gave away our land to the Arabs”.<sup>548</sup> While this name has its roots and significance in the Oslo Accords it also functions as a means to undermine activists in the leftist Israeli group—Women in Black.<sup>549</sup> Thus, like their Hindu right-wing counterparts, Zionist settler women invoke political histories through imagery and discourse in a calculated and strategic manner. These invocations not only call for and justify violence but they illustrate the intellect and the political knowledge (however appropriated) of right-wing women. As feminist scholars (and activists) often deem right-wing women into categories of subjects, and pawns of patriarchal nationalist and settler-colonial projects, constructing them as ignorant, *stupid*, and easily-led subjects; this strategic appropriation and use of politics, political histories, and

<sup>547</sup> Watch the speech by Sadhvi Prachi on the YouTube Channel of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3RZKWzPJDo>

<sup>548</sup> See the website of the Women in Green for more – [www.womeningreen.org](http://www.womeningreen.org)

<sup>549</sup> See the website of activist group Women in Black here – <http://womeninblack.org/>

‘feminine’ (feminist?) discourse to the present, producing my interlocutors as empowered subjects. Third, it reinforces the idea that my interlocutors were nationalist women who need not *witness* these atrocities in despair but who *could* and *must* act to curtail them. The *past*, thus, legitimises their violence in the *present*. As eighteen year-old Sumedha, pointed out empathetically at a session at a *Durga Vahini* camp,

We, as girls and women, need to step up. *We are sensitive and emotional, and we see more than the men do.* Jijabai has taught us that when we see our values and our Hindu nation are being destroyed by these Muslim and Christian outsiders, invaders, and anti-nationals; we *HAVE* to begin the fight and we too must train ourselves and our future children to gain independence from all this evil and establish a good government that cares about Hindus. We *WILL* become Jijabais. We *MUST* become Jijabais.<sup>146</sup>

Visual iconographies of *fierce* Goddesses and the rituals of story-telling on *brave* historical women, thus, both become *locations* of self-fashioning of the Hindu right-wing woman as a strategic, political, and warrior agent. They also become *locations* for finding difference (and contradictions) between the male and female discourses of the movements—divergences that indicate the transformative capacity of my interlocutors as well as the plurality and negotiations that encompass cultural nationalism. Lastly, they become symbolic and material *locations* that necessitate an aesthetic analysis of right-wing women’s politics and feminist international relations.

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<sup>146</sup> Fieldnotes, Kalyan, India, 9 May 2014.

global events (past, present, and future) are just one of many examples that dispute their secondary and ‘victim’ status and illustrate the potential (however, dreadful) of their agency and everyday violence.

Furthering this illustration, I’d also like to mention that right-wing women in the two movements that are the subject of this thesis also invoke popular, trendy, and neoliberal imagery and words in their violent discourses. I began this chapter by speaking about the use of “*Keep Calm and Settle Israel*” as well as “*Keep Calm and Build in Israel*” as new slogans that speak to the Keep Calm meme that has resurfaced and grown widely popular. Nadia, laughing about the slogan, mentioned that the young members of the movement recommended the words. Jumping on this trendy and popular bandwagon, Nadia and other members of the organization use this slogan in their lectures and talks while also printing them on mugs, t-shirts, stickers, and posters.<sup>550</sup> As Daniella who was responsible for designing the t-shirts said,

We have to ensure our struggles stay relevant to the young. That they identify with it and it becomes fashionable.<sup>551</sup>

Making Zionism ‘fashionable’ and popular have thus become important to the language of settler women (especially the older ones). In addition to catchy slogans, they also work towards making Hebrew trendy, coming up with ‘cool’ videos and songs (and poetry) to reach out to the young, and including plenty of *current jokes and memes* in their everyday language and invocations to self-defence and violence. Similarly, in the Hindu right-wing, catchy slogans, CDs and MP3s with right-wing speeches, t-shirts and posters with Goddesses (that are different from the traditional material household appearances of mythological figures), memes and online evocations, and

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<sup>550</sup> Conversation with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 8 August 2014.

<sup>551</sup> Interview with Daniella, Jerusalem, Palestine, 19 August 2014.

### Zionist Settler Women and the Performance of the Pedagogical

In this subsection, I elaborate on the *location* of aesthetic elements in the pedagogical practices of Zionist settler women. At the onset I argue that while Zionist settler women, like Hindu right-wing women, draw on certain mythological figures, their most significant aesthetic content was *located* in their pedagogical performances.<sup>147</sup> I use the term pedagogical performances to refer to performative elements in and *as* pedagogy. I had begun this section on aesthetics by presenting a narrative that was performed in pedagogical sessions by my interlocutor Nadia. Like Nadia's narration, performances of contemporary personal-political stories in/as pedagogical lessons were key to the fashioning of Zionist settler women as active political entities in Israel-Palestine. They were also crucial to drawing in audiences and cementing the lessons from a particular educational session. To elaborate, I'd like to visit a particular pedagogical performance by Women in Green.

Echoing earlier public protests, in September 2014, Women in Green decided to embark upon a pedagogical performance on hitchhiking in *Judea* and *Samaria*.<sup>148</sup> After the abduction (and subsequent killing) of the three Israeli teenagers, Gilad Shaer, Ayal Yifrah, and Naftali Frenkel, in June 2014, the settler community had erupted in numerous debates on the safety of the practice of hitchhiking. For settlers, hitchhiking was a *way of life* that not only strengthened their community and charitable spirit but also highlighted the gaps in the Israeli state's welfare and infrastructure for their communities. In July 2014, opinions on this *everyday* practice were divided. Some of my interlocutors expressed concern, calling hitchhiking an unsafe practice due to

<sup>147</sup> To name a few—Sarah, Rebecca (*Rivkah*), Rachel (*Rachelle*), and Leah; Miriam, the Prophetess; Deborah, the Judge; Huldah, the prophetess; Abigail, the wife of David; Rahab; and Esther.

<sup>148</sup> Their older public performances have included staging a funeral protest and carrying coffins towards President Bill Clinton when he visited Israel and holding a public trial for Yitzhak Rabin in Jerusalem. See Jacoby, T. (2005).

saffron clothes and accessories have not only been encouraged and distributed by right-wing women but have also become the norm among the young members of the branches. Butler (1997, 2006a) and Foucault (1990, 1991) have both asserted that the subject is produced out of discourses that are both symbolic and material. The materiality of these discourses, although present everywhere, are most visible as they interact with neoliberalism to create right-wing women subjects.

As the BJP harps on about *India Shining*<sup>552</sup> and *Acchhe Din*<sup>553</sup> (Good Days)—neoliberal slogans that try to hide tremendous inequality and injustice in the country—Hindu right-wing women also adapt to these new ideas in their violent language. Violence thus becomes a means to ensure *the good life—the acchhe din*. The Muslim other becomes the hindrance to this 'good life' and the *good global name of the country*. Those who oppose *development* (often highlighting the human rights that are being violated and marginalized communities that are being oppressed) are also made to join the category of these *hindrances* to the neoliberal idea of a *Shining* and *developed* powerful nation. In addition to constructing the 'other' as a hindrance to the promises of globalization, power, and neoliberalism, this language of violence also locates itself in new spaces—a few rallies are now held in malls, urban centres bloom with the presence of right-wing women; meetings shift to cafes, and manicured parks and gardens replace backyards. In the Zionist narrative, 'Arabs' and their violence are seen as obstacles that are limiting Israel's progress and prowess. While Israel is simultaneously constructed as *the only*

<sup>552</sup> India Shining was a marketing slogan – built on the feeling of economic optimism and popularized in 2004 by the then-ruling BJP.

<sup>553</sup> *Acche Din* (Good Days) was a slogan for the political campaign of Narendra Modi for the 2014 Indian General Elections. The slogan expanded to Good Days are Coming and conveyed that electing Modi would be the optimistic and prosperous choice for the country. The slogan was the basis of dozens of television ads for Modi as well, see them here – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2g7PXhys-5k> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WAhAD6YURtE>



the increased “risk of abduction by the Arabs”.<sup>149</sup> Others, including the leaders of Women in Green, felt that hitchhiking was a right that was not to be foregone in the face of terror. As Nadia asserted with anger,

WHY should *we* stop our way of life because *they* want to kill us? This has been the way we have lived for years and we will continue. Also, how else are we supposed to commute? Not everyone has cars and there are hardly any buses here. Anyway, even when we drive, they kill us, so we are not safe at all times. Then why give up something that has brought us closer, that has shown that we are a community that cares? We have to pay because *our boys* trusted others? What sense does that make?<sup>150</sup>

In July and early August 2014, the topic of hitchhiking began to permeate pedagogical sessions; it became the locus of discussions of all things political. Nadia and Dinah decided that it was time to “put their education into practice” and bring these discussions to the streets.<sup>151</sup> As Dinah elaborated,

How much can we discuss in these lectures and seminars? It was time to do something more exciting, take our session to a new place and see how we can actually change things instead of debating them.<sup>152</sup>

In early September 2014, my interlocutors staged, what I have termed, a pedagogical performance protest. They decided to convert an educational session into a public exercise of resistance. They procured dozens of large Israeli flags, wrapping some around themselves and carrying some with them. They got together at Givat Oz V’Gaon, inviting visitors and friends to join them. They walked over to Route 60 (Jerusalem-Hebron) and lined up by

<sup>149</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, August 10, 2014.

<sup>150</sup> Conversation with Nadia, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 10 August 2014.

<sup>151</sup> Interview with Dinah, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 12 August 2014.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

*democracy and developed country in the Middle East* and an important global social, economic, and political power; settler women insist on how its *only* obstacle to utopian neoliberal goals remains in the violence unleashed by the ‘Arabs’.

While this pandering to neoliberal ideas and trendy and popular manifestations of culture are being accepted as the norm, there remain tensions around this within both movements. The Hindu right-wing might accept saffron clothes and accessories but it also demands a high level of respectability both in terms of respecting the mythological figures and symbolic markers (flags, emblems, anthems) that must not, for instance, be disrespected by being placed on footwear; and in terms of how women dress and carry themselves in moral and respectable ways. Similarly, while it embraces neoliberal ideas (and even malls and cafes) it draws a line at *rampant Westernization* and the proliferation of bars. Zionist settlers, as well, grapple with tensions between traditional ideas of a labour Zionism that focuses on community and communal intimacy and neoliberal ideas of individuality and globalization. These tensions, nascent in their surfacing, indicate the strategic and often fraught tethering of right-wing women and their language of violence.

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Social imaginaries are constructed through language by the use of both, logic of equivalence and logic of difference (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). Language and discourse attempt to fix meanings using the constitution of *points de caption* or nodal points (Laclau, 1977). Using chains of significance, nodal points bind together signifiers that rearticulate meanings. Discursive projects thus need to construct as well as fix and stabilise the nodal points that structure social orders by articulating elements and floating signifiers into one unambiguous

the road. And just by the spot where the three boys were abducted, they began to hitchhike. They stopped cars, getting into them, traveling a few kilometres, jumping out of them, crossing the road, and looking for more rides; they honked and cheered; they sang songs of praise for their land; they took photographs; they laughed, a lot. They aimed to cover as much ground as possible and headed back to the outpost-settlement after two hours, rejuvenated and excited. My interlocutors had not only *marked* their presence in a very *public* way but they had extended their learning into tangible outputs; their theory had transformed into praxis.<sup>153</sup>

I'd like to unpack five points of interest from this (and other) pedagogical performance(s) of my interlocutors.

First, as I mentioned earlier, performative elements drew in the audience affectively, invoking personal-political issues that were relevant, contemporary, and sentimental and presenting them through means that were emotional, unique, and even fun. Second, like the abovementioned example, they provided a means of *transforming* pedagogical content in *action*. This rendered the content more effective and memorable. Third, they provided my interlocutors with a means to construct themselves as mobilised grassroots political actors, who much like left-wing activists, engaged in forms of protest and street-theatre to effect social and policy change (Moser, 2003). Fourth, the hitchhiking protest in particular provided a space where settler women not only drew attention to themselves and their causes but also marked and occupied Palestinian territory and land through Zionist pedagogy. In the process they also carved a site for leisure, pleasure, fun, and friendship with each other. Fifth and final, pedagogical performances

set of meanings (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). The larger projects of Hindu nationalism and Zionist settler colonialism construct a particular set of meanings through their dominant discourses. Challenging (as well as acquiescing to) these meanings, right-wing women use varied logics of equivalence and difference to articulate an alternative set of meanings through a carefully crafted language of violence. Furthermore with *repetitive* affective and embodied displays of these languages (through speeches, protests, parades, and other events), the language of violence is not just a performance by right-wing women subjects, but it is a performativity—one that constitutes and *makes* the subject and also produces the contradictory subject positions right-wing women occupy (Butler, 2006a).

This section has offered a nuanced examination of how the language of violence is constructed, perpetuated, transformed, and uttered by right-wing women. In doing so, this examination has not only illustrated the violence inherent in language as well as the discursive justifications for acts of violence by right-wing women but has also pointed out to the tensions and simmering contradictions within these organizations (both between the male and female ends of the movement as well as within the women's project). In the next section, I nuance the understanding of everyday violence by right-wing women.

### 6.3 Everyday Violence, Everyday Life

From the very beginning, this thesis has posited itself to be a study in the 'everyday'. While right-wing women's lives sound anything but mundane and ordinary to the reader, the narratives this thesis has presented dwell on the *spectacular* and the *big* to find relevance and manifestation in the quotidian

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<sup>153</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 4 September 2014.



nurtured a fascinating *location* for interrogating how my interlocutors' politics interacted with wider (and often contradictory) intellectual and activist debates. To elaborate, one of the key justifications put forth by those in support of hitchhiking was drawn from contemporary feminist debates on rape culture and victim-blaming. The call to stop hitchhiking was seen as one that disempowered the victim, shifting the burden of responsibility from the state, society, and oppressor to the oppressed. Instead, as the hitchhiking performance illustrated, my interlocutors argued there was a dire need to *reclaim* the streets. Sarai elaborated on this one of the sessions in late August. She said,

When a woman is raped, should we blame her? But we do. We say she shouldn't have worn this, she shouldn't have gone out. We make excuses for the one who commits the rape and tell her she should have behaved differently. How is that fair? Should women stop going out? It is the same here. This is *our* land and we should be able to go out whenever we want; however we want. No one has the right to rape us. No one should be killing us! And if they do, it is not our fault. It is because, like the woman who is raped, the state fails—it doesn't provide safety. And it is because like rapists, there are Arabs who want to kill us. No one should blame us and make us change our lives while we are just doing what we have to do—*live*.<sup>154</sup>

Sarai's words are captivating, as they not only demonstrate the significance of pedagogical performances, strengthening the four other points I have mentioned, but also because they illustrate the process of intellectualizing and justifying settler colonial politics and violence. Performative elements were embedded with regularity in my interlocutors' pedagogical sessions. Their

and the daily. The right-wing woman constantly negotiates her exclusive and inordinate circumstances (with regards to the threat of the 'other') with her abilities and hard work to carry on living the day-to-day with strength and happiness. The previous section in this chapter has elaborated on the language of this ordinary and everyday violence—conversations and utterances about the mundane chores of everyday existence disrupted with hatred and violence; hatred and violence lacing the language of the domestic and mundane. As Veena Das (2008:13) poignantly writes, violence has the “potential to both disrupt the ordinary and become part of the ordinary”. Holding on to these powerful words by Das, this section traces this potential and practice of violence as it seeps into everyday life—blending into the walls of your home like an old curtain, becoming a part of your daily comfortable landscape, reminding you of its presence as it flutters with the breeze every now and then, only to become indiscernible again.

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I had visited the outpost-settlement quite a few times, but not once by myself. This was the first time I made my way there on my own. I went across Jerusalem to the big bus station and queued up for the Egged Bus Route Number 160 to *Kiryat Arba*. The public bus that takes you to the settlements along Route 60, painted dark green like the other buses from the station, but (proudly) possessing bullet proof windows and doors. The bus queue was fascinating and I tried to ascertain who all the boarders were—women and men who lived in settlements but worked, shopped, or visited friends/family in Jerusalem; school students, especially *yeshiva* students, going home to the settlements for holidays and weekends; visitors (like myself?) uncertain of the

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<sup>154</sup> Conversation with Sarai, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 27 August 2014.

pervasiveness facilitated Zionist settler women's everyday politics, providing a *location* for analysing the aesthetic in right-wing women's mobilisation.

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In this section, I have examined the aesthetics of the content, ritual, and performance of right-wing women's pedagogy. Identifying, three *locations* of aesthetics—prayer, iconography and story-telling of Hindu right-wing women, and pedagogical performances of Zionist settler women—this section has argued that right-wing women use various elements, visuals, and performances of the mythological, the appropriated historical, and the contemporary to construct rituals, produce themselves as teachers and students, and shape the subjectivities of those they educate. As they do so, they also create alternative (and often competing) 'feminine' discourses and imageries of the right-wing that negotiate for space and dominance within their larger male-formulated projects.

Drawing on Sylvester (2002), Bleiker (2009:11) argues that aesthetic approaches to international politics and the social sciences allow scholars to rethink knowledge claims that they have taken for granted and promote discussions and debates around previously silenced topics. This section has illustrated that right-wing women *too* rethink knowledge claims that have been taken for granted in their communities. They (re)shape, (re)configure, and transform some of these male-formulated hegemonic knowledges through the authoring, appropriation, and ritualization of discourses in their pedagogies, thereby, *also* promoting discussions and debates around previously silenced topics. Aesthetics, thus, was not only a lens of examination for the international and the feminist in scholarly endeavours but also a crucial means through which right-wing women strategized and enabled pedagogies and politics.

procedures and listening to whispers about how the bus was not safe from attacks by the 'Arabs'.<sup>554</sup> As a commuter told me,

The stones won't do anything to these windows, and even bullets won't get through. The difficult part is when the bus stops and people get in and out. That is an opportunity for terrorists to attack us.<sup>555</sup>

On the bus, a climate of paranoia and fear coexisted with the reassurance of thick glass and armed guards. Stickers on the bus walls asked commuters to duck and fall to the floor if there was an attack. Other stickers reassured passengers that their safety was the utmost concern. Misplaced signage, pushing and pulling at your anxieties while assuaging them at the same time. And me, the researcher, the *brown-skinned researcher*, whose only marks of not being an 'Arab' were the Indian clothes and the round dot on my forehead. It screamed at those who stared with selfish worry—*don't shoot me out of fear, I am just a student, I am not your constructed 'enemy', I am not the one you occupy*—and they stared a lot. Misplaced, I was too, on this bus ride of state violence and ethical dilemmas.<sup>556</sup>

The bus made its way out of Jerusalem, on to Route 60, a *shared* road between Israel and Palestine, occupied and controlled by the IDF. We stopped at various places, picking up people, soldiers even, and then leaving hurriedly. My first time on this bus and so I asked a lady – *Where is Gush Etsyon junction? I am to get out there*. She fumbled and said,

I'll let you know when we reach there. But be careful, it is a dangerous stop. There is a roundabout there where Arab cars slow down and they

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<sup>554</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 20 August 2014.

<sup>555</sup> Conversation with anonymous commuter 1, Bus 160, West Bank, Palestine, 19 August 2014.

<sup>556</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 20 August 2014.

### 3.4 A Brief Ethnography of ‘Things’ in Right-Wing Women’s Pedagogical Spaces

The second time I met Sanjanaji, the head of the Delhi chapter of *Durga Vahini*, she insisted that I accompany her to an event in South Delhi so we could continue our conversation en route. The event was being hosted by Anitaji—the respected head of *Matrushakti* (Power of the Mother), a Hindu right-wing organization for older women—in memory of her mother who had died recently. We made our way to the hall where this memorial was being held in Sanjanaji’s car.<sup>155</sup> She agonized that she was wearing bright yellow, a rather disrespectful colour for the sombre occasion. Her repetitive worrying over her clothes was punctuated with two things—instructions to her driver and angry rants on how Muslims in Delhi had occupied the entire city with their mosques and “loudspeakers”.<sup>156</sup> I, too, was a little anxious over the bright pink in my otherwise pale blue and white outfit. Reaching the venue just in time, we hurried in to pay our respects to the family of the deceased and then made our way to sit at the ‘female side’ of the hall to partake in the prayer ceremony.

After the memorial service, we followed the crowd to the grounds of the hall for refreshments. As we stood with cups of tea in our hand, Sanjanaji introduced me to Kishoreji, a male leader of the RSS and a “close ally” for the “women in Hindutva”.<sup>157</sup> She lovingly reprimanded the seventy-year-old man for putting sugar in his tea reminding him that he suffered from diabetes. He laughed affectionately, turned to me, and said,

Sanjana is the reason *Durga Vahini* survives. She is a good teacher and that is what is most important for the organization. She knows what is

<sup>155</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 17 February 2014.

<sup>156</sup> Conversation with Sanjana, New Delhi, India, 17 February 2014.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

shoot at us Jewish people standing at the big bus stop. That is where Hamas kidnapped Gilad, Naftali, and Ayal.<sup>557</sup>

I thought of the work of Eyal Weizman (2012), who talks about the architecture of occupation and mentions how roundabouts on these *shared* roads are constructed to stop and search (and humiliate and kill) Palestinians as they travel between their villages and towns. Settlers have always been given the right of way—just another spatial element to policing and disrupting the lives of the colonized. We arrived at the junction and I left the bus, along with several others. It was a popular stop. I saw the signs to the outpost-settlement and remembered it from my earlier trips (by car and shuttle bus with some of my interlocutors). It was a hot day and my clothes stuck to my back. I walked up the hill, gasping for breath. Cars passed by, people stared.<sup>558</sup> I reached Givat Oz V’Gaon, caught my breath, and walked in to find Nadia, ready for our interview, a smile on my face.

Nadia sits across from me and tells me again about the new merchandise that she is getting made. Fifteen minutes pass and she gets a call on her phone. “We have to go, come with me, we will talk along the way”, she says.<sup>559</sup> Nadia and I walk to her big black SUV. I notice the child seat in the backseat just as she tells me that the car has bulletproof windows. She has to suddenly rush to the nearby settlement of Efrata to pass something to one of her daughters. As we buckle into this car, she continues our conversation. She says,

We at Women in Green want to push the Arabs out of Judea and Samaria by breaking any continuous Arab area with our settlements and with our fear. We patrol Arab villages, marking their presence in

<sup>557</sup> Conversation with anonymous commuter 2, Bus 160, West Bank, Palestine, 19 August 2014.

<sup>558</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 20 August 2014.

<sup>559</sup> Conversation with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 19 August 2014.

needed to make younger girls feel safe in all the spaces we have—the camps, the meetings, and the community. Only when they feel safe, will they learn and keep coming back to learn.<sup>158</sup>

As I nodded and Sanjanaji blushed, he continued,

As you know we host our annual Delhi-area Hindutva women's training camp in a building that is a school. The young girls come and stay in the school for a whole week and receive intellectual and physical training. Many are leaving their parents for the first time and the camp must be inviting and comfortable for them.<sup>159</sup> Last year, Sanjana could not come to see the premises of the school before the camp, as her mother-in-law was sick. So I went and saw the school and everything looked good. There was space for classes and lectures with chairs, tables, blackboards, etc. We converted some rooms to dormitories by putting mattresses on the floor, set up some space in the canteen for proper meals, made sure there were taps and buckets in the bathrooms for the girls to bathe, and checked out the playground where we would have all the training in physical stuff like martial arts etc. Everything was good, so I made the formal arrangements and finalised the place and we were set.<sup>160</sup>

Sanjanaji interrupted him,

But, of course, as a man, he made a big mistake because he just doesn't know how women and girls live and the things they need!<sup>161</sup>

Kishoreji laughed, nodded in agreement, and continued,

The day before the camp was to begin, Sanjana came to see the school, and she was totally shocked to see the bathroom. There were no

the territories. We stone cars with green 'Palestinian' number plates and physically block the paths of any so-called 'Palestinians' walking in the area. In Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, we demonstrate in Arab neighbourhoods, with lots aggression. We even guard our own settlements with weapons. We train the young girls—all of them—in self-defence. And you know what, we oppose any kind of mixed relationships and marriages and all we want is a system that will push them out.<sup>560</sup>

I asked innocently, "*push them out where?*" She looks angry and says,

To the other side of the Jordan River; they have so many Muslim countries—I think 54 of them—we only have one place. Why can't they go there?<sup>561</sup>

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As I write this narrative into this thesis, my mind wanders to two things that I'd like to share (forgive me for this interlude).

First, how similar this idea of *pushing them out with violence* was to the aims of the Hindu right-wing movement. The Hindutva ideology, like Zionism, is based on religious connection to land (Hansen, 1999). Hindu right-wing ideologues professed a desire for an *Akhand Bharat* (united India) from *Kandahar to Khamboj* (Cambodia) where only religions that had a connection to the land (and a loyalty to the land through this connection) could live and prosper (ibid.). As my interlocutor Sanjanaji, the head of the Delhi chapter of the *Durga Vahini*, said,

This land is only for Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists; anyone else has to live as per our rules. These Muslims, they pray looking to Mecca—so that is where their blood, heart, and loyalty lies—so let

<sup>158</sup> Conversation with Sanjana and Kishore, New Delhi, India, 17 February 2014.

<sup>159</sup> This was also reflected in Nisha Pahuja's documentary on Hindu right-wing camps (and Miss India camps) – The World Before Her. See more here, <http://www.worldbeforeher.com/>

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>560</sup> Conversation with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 19 August 2014.

<sup>561</sup> Ibid.

partitions in between spaces for girls to take their baths. She was horrified and so angry. She said there was no way the girls were going to be comfortable bathing in each other's presence without privacy. She could not believe that I did not think of the problem with this space and how in our culture this sort of open-ness was simply not acceptable. So she sat all day and all night, building partitions.<sup>162</sup>

Sanjanaji sighed and finished the story,

Yes, I had to, *at the last minute*, somehow find material to make proper partitions that were waterproof and stable. I ran around finding material and sat there all night, building these partitions, so the girls could have privacy while bathing. How else will they live here for a whole week? By the morning, we were done and the camp was ready by the time the girls began to arrive. I will never again let a man decide what is needed for a girl's camp.<sup>163</sup>

Sanjanaji's actions to create the perfect conditions for a weeklong pedagogical event were an exemplary story of dedication, insightfulness, and expediency. She was aware that the physical space of the *Durga Vahini* camp and the *things* it contained was crucial to the teaching and learning that was to take place there and wanted to ensure a basic level of comfort for the girls and young women. She, like other organisers of Hindu right-wing women's pedagogical events, was also aware that the materiality of this space went beyond comfort—it was meant to inspire, ritualize, embody, and embed ideas, practices, and narratives. Thus, pedagogical spaces were to present themselves by containing agential 'things' that were endowed with different properties and linked to one another (Bourdieu, 1989). As Sanjanaji had

them go there; there is no dearth of Muslim countries, we want to push them out of our country.<sup>562</sup>

Violence, thus, becomes a force not only to *keep us in* but also simultaneously to *push them out*—the former *only* ensured through the latter.

Second, although my ethnography is based in settlements in the Southern West Bank, I visited the *Gush Katif* museum in Jerusalem. A large sign at the entrance of the museum says Gaza with an arrow going inwards. The museum was set up to commemorate the *loss* of the settlements in Gaza. Documents, photographs, films, and objects placed to deal with the loss of settler lives and communities in occupied Gaza (Katriel, 2013). Elian, the museum guide (and co-curator) joined me as I walked around and added,

We were very happy in Gaza. Our plan was to use a four-finger approach to the area. Imagine the land of Gaza with Arabs is your left arm. Now put the four fingers of your right arm onto this land, with each finger, slightly apart from the next. These four fingers are Jewish communities; if we can disrupt and interrupt Arab land and people then we can push them out. That is what we were doing. But then of course, the government made us leave. Our lives stopped. Everything was destroyed. Businesses. Farms. Houses. Schools. Hospitals. We had to move and find new lives in the rest of the country. We should be pushing them out, but we were pushed out.<sup>563</sup>

Her words and emotions would be laughable with their irony if I weren't so devastated with disbelief and horror.

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<sup>162</sup> Conversation with Sanjana and Kishore, New Delhi, India, 17 February 2014.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>562</sup> Interview with Sanjana, New Delhi, India, 14 February 2014.

<sup>563</sup> Conversation with Elian, Gush Katif Museum, Jerusalem, Israel-Palestine, 23 September 2014.

noticed in a conversation about events and camps the previous week – “*every detail must be planned, every ‘thing’ must be perfect*”.<sup>164</sup>

In this section, I provide a brief ethnographic account of ‘things’ that *make* the pedagogical spaces of right-wing women. While my fieldwork largely focused on *subjects* and their narratives, here I’d like to encounter the trans-subjective that holds the mutually constitutive relationships between subjects and objects, underlining the idea that the former cannot be understood or *produced* without the latter (Miller, 2005; Jain, 2007; Tilley, 2013). In his work on material culture, Tilley (2013:4) emphasises that the study of objects— “things as material matter, as found or made, as static or mobile, rare or ubiquitous, local or exotic, new or old, ordinary or special, small or monumental, traditional or modern, simple or complex” —was as necessary to the understanding of social life as the focus on language, performance, and representation. *Things* allowed for the emergence and shifting of symbolic relationships between the signified and signifiers, and were agents with powers of transformation, *like subjects* (Sofaer, 2007). Using the term “cultural biography”, Kopytoff (1988) implores the ethnographer to trace the life of *things*, as she would of *people* – “Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognized “ages” or periods in the thing’s “life”, and what are the cultural markers for them?” (Kopytoff, 1988:66-67; Hussein, 2011).

This section is grounded in these questions and argues that pedagogical spaces of right-wing women *contain* specific *things* that embody certain spatio-temporalities and provide symbolic power to the practices of teaching and

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<sup>164</sup> Interview with Sanjana, New Delhi, India, 14 February 2014.

Nadia and I reach Efrata, a settlement just above the Gush Etsyon junction, designed like a seaside European town. Nadia lives here and is very well known in these winding streets. I am trying to look *Indian* and *friendly*, whatever that means. As we walk towards her home, she runs into a neighbour’s daughter, Galia, who is currently doing her military service. They embrace and I stand around awkwardly fighting my social anxieties, feeling the brown-ness of my skin, and working hard to follow their Hebrew.<sup>564</sup> She turns around, introduces me, and says to me,

See this! We have all served in the military in our youth, but mothering and family have taken away our military lives.<sup>565</sup>

Being absorbed in the ‘domestic’ and feminine, she told me, has led women to take a backseat in the Zionist movement and thus there was an urgent need to continue fighting for Zionism through daily and simple means.

As we head back to the outpost-settlement, on the same road—Route 60—shared by Israelis and Palestinians (but occupied by the IDF), she spots many green-number plates of what she calls, “*shitty Arab cars*”. She rolls down her window and spits in the direction of one.<sup>566</sup> Failing to hide my anger, disgust, and shock, I squeak – “*Nadia, WHY did you do that?*” She pities my ignorance and calmly says,

Being a soldier and a woman is hard, Akanksha. You also have to take care of your children. But when you are a settler, living in these parts of the Jewish land, you have to be aggressive every single day in every single place. It becomes routine. I can pick up my grandchildren from school and spit towards an Arab on the street, honk at his car, block his

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<sup>564</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 20 August 2014.

<sup>565</sup> Conversation with Nadia Matar and Galia, Efrata, West Bank, Palestine, 19 August 2014.

<sup>566</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 20 August 2014.



learning. These objects—tangible and palpable—intertwine with the sensory to enable and disable socio-spatial practices (Bourdieu, 1989). I will, thus, examine the role of *things* in the pedagogical spaces of both the Hindu right-wing women's movement and the Zionist settler women's project, elaborating on three aspects—the proliferation and commodification of *everyday* objects; the *creation* of *special* educational spaces through objects; and the role of grandiose objects.

### Everyday Objects, Everywhere Things

I sat across from Sanjanaji in her living room—a space with a few sofas and a centre table—that also functioned as her husband's office. As she spoke to me, her arms and hands moved around empathetically, drawing me into her words. Every few minutes she fell in synch with the poster behind her—an image of the Goddess *Kali*, adorned with skulls, her multiple limbs giving the illusion of movement. The room, a shared space, was littered with objects that had meaning within the Hindu right-wing women's movement—tiny sculptures of fierce goddesses, framed portraits of *Bharat Mata*, a calendar with the logo of *Durga Vahini*, religious imagery, political posters, and masks of Modi's face.<sup>165</sup> When asked about these objects, Sanjanaji elaborated,

I like these things. They make me feel *at home*. I also think it is necessary that these objects were a part of our private spaces, that they decorate them. After all our Hindutva life is part of our domestic life also, so why not honour it with these? They also remind me of my

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<sup>165</sup> The Modi mask was popularized during Modi's campaign for the Indian General Elections of 2014. The mask was simple and made of paper with a rubber band attached to pull it over one's head. The masks were being given away at the BJP rallies and Hindutva organizations, and were being sold by several retailers. There were also online tutorials that allowed supporters to print and fashion the mask by themselves. For more on Modi's campaign's materiality – see Biswas (2014). *The Making of Narendra Modi*. BBC News. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-27249952>

path, throw something at him or her. You can never stop being violent.<sup>567</sup>

I scribble in my notebook, later – *spaces of everyday violence and aggression allow my interlocutors to mobilize outside of the sphere of home and family, while at the same time they use a language laced with violence and practice tactics of violence claiming to safeguard the very home and the family.*<sup>568</sup> Whatever that might mean.

Nadia's actions and practices were not exceptional. In the months that I spent with the women from Women in Green and the women settlers, I noticed how *ordinary* violence was in their lives. I have elaborated in detail on how the language of violence seeps into daily routine, punctuating sentences like commas and periods. I have also spoken about how the language of violence draws on daily routine; lemons and milk turning into objects of warfare and aggression as easily as they are used to as additions to tea. In the name of *protests* and *demonstrations for rights*, my interlocutors routinely set out to *push out Arabs*. They entered 'Arab' farms and uprooted and destroyed plants and trees. They set fire to olive trees, trashing any produce. They left garbage and litter in these spaces (much like the garbage thrown by Hebron settlers onto the old Palestinian city of Hebron and its market). They beat up and thrashed any children (*potential Arab terrorists*) they encountered and stoned *Arab cars*. They pushed women, yelled curses, disrupting, screaming, kicking; their voices louder and more aggressive when they were in a group. These everyday acts (alongside the acts that Nadia highlighted) were both—an individual duty and foray as well a collective activity. Chillingly, these violent

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<sup>567</sup> Conversation with Nadia Matar, Route 60, West Bank, Palestine, 19 August 2014.

<sup>568</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 20 August 2014.

purpose in life when I look around. They don't let me forget what I *need to do*.<sup>166</sup>

These objects of various shapes, sizes, and colours—ranging from those found in my interlocutor's home to notebooks, pins, clothes, flags, pens, clocks, postcards etc. —were found *everywhere*. They not only proliferated through homes and belongings of all my interlocutors and lined and *decorated* the meeting spaces, the *sabhas*, and the *shakhas* (branches) but they were also found *on* the bodies of Hindu right-wing women. When I asked my interlocutor Veena about these *things*, their ubiquity, and their relevance (if any) to education, she asserted,

The big camps where we teach are not the only places where we can show off *our* saffron. They only happen a few times a year—most girls will only attend them once a year—so our students and members *have* to be reminded of *our* messages, *our* images, *our* stories and the best way to do it is through objects. They look at these things and they remember what we discussed in the seminars and lectures, they remember what we taught them in the martial arts and physical classes. They inspire us. Also, you are forgetting the bigger picture—we *like* these things. We *want* them around us when we teach and learn.<sup>167</sup>

The proliferation of these *things* in pedagogical and domestic spaces went hand-in-hand with their commodification. In February 2014, in the lanes of *Jhandewalan* in New Delhi, I visited the largest Hindutva retail store. Situated next to the RSS printing press, *Suruchi Prakashan*, the store was being managed by three men and was vast, with hundreds of shelves littered with every imaginable object. On one end of the store were the massive

<sup>166</sup> Interview with Sanjana, New Delhi, India, 17 February 2014.

<sup>167</sup> Interview with Veena, Thane, India, 12 April 2014.

acts of the day also became sites of bonding, friendship, socializing, laughter, and intimacy.<sup>569</sup>

Like the Zionist settler women, my Hindu right-wing women interlocutors' routines were also laced with violence. In the introduction to this chapter, I have provided narratives of the routine 'walks' and outings taken by my interlocutors in Mumbai. I have also delved into the language behind the acts of such violence. What is crucial to mention here is that the political violence of Hindutva women, routinized and made ordinary, has very specific spatial elements to it. While Zionist women's violence is mediated and spatialized through the architecture of the Israeli state (checkpoints, walls, barbed wires, roundabouts, controlled roads, blocks) and the design of the settlements (high fences, barbed wires, armed guards, drones, cameras); Hindu right-wing women operate in the absence of these *top-down* mechanisms of occupation and control. Instead, the apparatus of the right-wing movement takes control and builds and fabricates these spatial systems through which violence can occur easily and daily.<sup>570</sup> Hindu right-wing women's organizations (like the men's organizations) thus operate like a tree with branches—central chapters that break into chapters in each part of India (North, South, East, West, Centre), that further break into province and state chapters, and then district, city, town, village chapters, and finally neighbourhood chapters (Hansen, 1999). This network of nodes ensures that right-wing women's meeting spaces (the *shakhas* and the *sabhas*) are present in every locality and even if the 'Muslims' cannot be separated through fences, checkpoints, and walls, they can be separated through acts of everyday violence.

<sup>569</sup> Philippe Bourgois elaborates on these intimacies in his piece *The Everyday Violence of Gang Rape* in Scheper-Hughes, N. (2003). *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*. Wiley-Blackwell

<sup>570</sup> Not to say that the state doesn't help, especially the current state and government.

bookshelves, stocking texts published by Hindutva men and women. The rest of the store was a cornucopia of trinkets and *things* that were arranged in no particular order. Sculptures and idols of Gods and Goddesses in various sizes and materials stood next to busts and statues of Hindutva leaders. Stacks of images and posters of ideologues were placed next to *utility items* such as clocks, pins, calendars, pens, key chains, greeting cards, notebooks, and even USB sticks. Manoharji, the manager of the store was in conversation with a woman who wanted a “*custom-made painting of her family surrounded by Hindutva leaders in the colours of a forest*” when I entered the store.<sup>168</sup> As he registered her order, he came over to me and introduced himself. When I asked him about his customers, he elaborated,

We mainly have two types of people who come here. Some want these things for their homes or for gifts. Homes are everywhere, but gifts work especially for those who want to take these things from India when visiting relatives abroad or gifts that Hindus who live outside the country want to take back with them when they visit home. And I encourage them a lot—if you are going to send a Happy Diwali card or even a Happy New Year Message, why not send one with *Bharat Mata* or *Shivaji* on it? Second are the teachers from *Samiti* and *Durga Vahini*—they need these materials in their classes, they tell stories of the people in these things, they tell stories from *those* books, they give out pins, notebooks, and pens to the students. Everything in those classes is from one of our stores.<sup>169</sup>

My interaction with the aforementioned interlocutors and my time in this mammoth store allows me to put forth four arguments in this subsection.

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<sup>168</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 12 February 2014.

<sup>169</sup> Conversation with Manohar, New Delhi, 12 February 2014.

Women, thus, make it a point, to harass any families of the ‘other’ through any means available. These include (and are not limited to) screaming, cursing, yelling, throwing stones at, kicking, beating up or slapping a child, hustling and pushing women wearing veils and burkhas, destroying their gardens and properties, as well as acts like taking over their parking spots (and hence bothering them), not allowing your house-help to also work at Muslim houses, spreading rumours about Muslim families, ‘dishonouring’ them through stories and fabrications, throwing garbage near their homes etc.

As I write this chapter and re-visit these daily occurrences and acts of violence, I’d like to make two points. First, these routine acts signifying the “banality of evil” either turn into or are supplementary to *bigger* and more spectacular acts of violence (Arendt, 1973). During heightened tensions and riots, women participate in the looting, killing, and arson with abandon. Often, these situations flare up because of stories and rumours started by the women. For instance, Nidhi elaborated,

We heard that the *Mullah* family who lives down the road were buying idols of our Gods and then smashing them. So we had to do something. We went, twelve of us ladies, and we pushed their door and opened it and got in and beat up the guy who lives there.<sup>571</sup>

When asked whether they found *any evidence* of these broken idols, Nidhi shook her head and quickly added,

Someone must have told them we were coming so they would have hidden the pieces. We had confirmed information.<sup>572</sup>

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<sup>571</sup> Interview with Nidhi, Pune, India, 18 June 2014.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid.

First, I argue that *everyday things* in Hindu right-wing women's pedagogical spaces were *commodities* that produced subjectivities through their circulation (Jain, 2007:20). They travelled from the store to the local, national, and international and were part of the *transnational* flow of capital and politics. They were not only bought and sold but were circulated, bartered, and gifted; their meaning inscribed in "their forms, their uses, [and] their trajectories" (Appadurai, 1988:5). Thus, moving away from Marxian view of the production/consumption-dominated commodity, I draw on Appadurai (1988) and Kopytoff (1988) to argue that these *everyday things* of pedagogy in Hindu right-wing women's lives had a 'commodity-phase' in their social lives. While they were monetized objects, they *moved out* of their commodity state, also functioning as sites of religious meanings and practices, props in protests and political rallies, family heirlooms, souvenirs, mementos, gifts, home décor, and holders as well as facilitators of educational logistics (reading, writing, planning), performances, and stories. Through these *multiple lives* and circulation, these *everyday* objects and their prolific presence in pedagogical spaces mediated the operational and the sensory and affective in right-wing women's rituals and lessons, participating in the production of the subjectivities of both, teachers and students.

Second, I argue that these *everyday things* that enabled pedagogical practices were also an interesting point of intersection of the religious and the political. As elaborated in *Section 3.3*, images and narratives of fierce Goddesses invoke the religious feminine to *construct* and sustain alternative discourses of Hindu right-wing women. The proliferation of religious images and objects (from prayer beads to *gharmandirs* (home-temples) to adornments for idols) that spoke of/to these discourses mediated experiences of not only the sacred but also the political, problematizing the dichotomies of private/public and material/spiritual (Jain, 2007; Moallem, 2014). Third, as Hindu right-wing

When not flaring up into these kinds of policing situations or riots, women's routine violence gives them the confidence to join "bigger rallies and bigger fights".<sup>573</sup> As my interlocutors Pooja and Priya mentioned,

You slowly slowly gain confidence. First, you know, we do what we have to do to stop Muslims in our area only. We make sure they don't get a moment of peace and we show them we are lions who are not afraid to eat them up. We don't just bark and roar. We bite and kill. And then when something big happens—like a big *danga* (riot) or war like situation—we are ready. We are not scared; we know exactly what to do.<sup>574</sup>

Violence that becomes part of the ordinary thus then transforms into or supplements violence that disrupts the ordinary. Everyday acts of aggression turn into documented acts where women have killed, engaged in arson, physically injured, stabbed, and shot at 'anti-Hindu' communities during riots and tensions.<sup>575</sup>

The second point that is interesting here is that violence against the 'other' in these spatial arrangements often centres on what could be traditionally called *domestic or private* matters—food, consumption, worship and idols, and love and relationships. Food—especially the consumption of meat (particularly beef) —becomes a medium through which violent spatialities are organized. Muslims are denied housing in 'Hindu' complexes on account of their meat-eating habits. Muslims rumoured to be eating beef are attacked and killed.<sup>576</sup> Shops selling beef (usually owned by Muslim families) are attacked and food becomes a reason for differentiating between *us and them* as well as a reason

<sup>573</sup> Conversation with Pooja and Priya, Mumbai, India, 7 June 2014.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid.

<sup>575</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 7 June 2014.

<sup>576</sup> An example of this is the recent lynching of a man in Dadri, North India, who was accused of keeping beef in his fridge. See more here - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-34409354>

women were responsible for *decorating* their pedagogical venues as well as their homes, acquiring these *everyday things* and curating them in carefully crafted ways, I argue, was not only an assertion of Hindu right-wing women's space in the larger political movement but also pertinent to their social and cultural capital and standing. Therefore, the *properties* of the object—the make, authenticity, size, and material—enabled (or disabled) decision-making, bargaining, and mediation of power (Mehta, 2015).

Fourth, while I have focused on the *presence* of *things*, there also remains the question of objects that produce subjectivities through their *absence*. In the narrative that opened this section, Sanjanaji complained about the mosques and loudspeakers that *disturbed* the peace of *her* city.<sup>170</sup> Her remarks echoed with those of my other interlocutors who applauded themselves for the absence of *Muslim*, *Christian*, and *anti-national* objects in their *sacred* pedagogical spaces. These objects were *things* of nuisance, betrayal, disgust, and even sedition. They included food items like meat (especially beef), imagery and iconography of *secular* leaders like Gandhi and Ambedkar, religious imagery from the faiths of the 'other', materials that symbolized syncretism in South Asia,<sup>171</sup> and *anti-national* and *leftist* things like books by Marx (or Arundhati Roy) and artwork that "made fun of the Hindu nation".<sup>172</sup> These *things* were brought up to incite hatred and violence. Their absence made these tropes even more powerful, asserting that the pedagogical space was *clean* and rid of these things, *now if only the country could be*.

This discussion of *everyday things* in pedagogical spaces would not be complete without mentioning my Zionist settler interlocutors in Israel-

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<sup>170</sup> Conversation with Sanjana, New Delhi, India, 17 February 2014.

<sup>171</sup> For example: artwork from the Mughal era or rugs with 'Persian' designs.

<sup>172</sup> Interview with Veena, Thane, India, 13 April 2014.

for unleashing violence and creating divisions (spatially) with separation of markets, housing, stores, restaurants etc. A point that was nailed into me as I accompanied my interlocutor Veena to her friend's house in Thane. As we crossed a meat market, while sitting in an auto rickshaw, insulated from the sights and even the smells (partly), she began to close her nose and pray loudly. She said,

These people and their meat. How can they kill and eat. It's good they have to live in separate areas in the city. But I still have to cross their area to go to another area. I wish they simply didn't exist here and would just go.<sup>577</sup>

The spatial design of life along communal lives in India suddenly looked very similar to the design of settlements, separated and inconvenienced through the presence of the 'other' that should simply be *pushed out*.

Interestingly, a few Hindu right-wing women use food as a weapon and throw bags of pork, onto Muslim households and mosques. As Naina said,

I held my nose because meat smells. But I took the bag and flung it over the wall into Ahmed and his family's house. Let them see what we go through when they throw beef at us.<sup>578</sup>

Ahmed, who lived down the road from Naina and her family, increased the height of his walls and added wires on top of them. Spatial designs of settlements sprouted up right in front of my eyes, this time from the *bottom-up*. I have already mentioned how idols and sites of worship become reasons for violence but I should also mention that rumours around love and relationships are common reasons for aggression and beatings. As elaborated in *Chapter Four* and the introduction to this chapter, a common practice for Hindu right-wing women is to straighten out Muslim youth who are trying to

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<sup>577</sup> Conversation with Veena, Thane, India, 9 June 2014.

<sup>578</sup> Interview with Naina, New Delhi, India, 16 February 2014.

Palestine. Like Hindu right-wing women, the homes and pedagogical spaces of Zionist settler women were also littered with *things* of significance.<sup>173</sup> These included religious artefacts, maps of *Eretz Yisrael*, Israeli flags, posters and postcards of imagery, mottos, and logos of Women in Green, and utility items such as coffee mugs, stickers, and plates with *catchy* Zionist slogans. These also included objects *for* the body—pendants with maps and Hebrew letters, t-shirts and accessories like handbags, scarves, and caps/hats with Zionist slogans and images/logos of Women in Green.<sup>174</sup> Like objects in Hindu right-wing spaces, these were also commodities that circulated, containing *multiple lives* in their trajectories. They facilitated pedagogical sessions, enabling sensory and embodied political experiences and re-enforcing educational rituals, performances, and stories. They were also markers of social, cultural, and political capital, and a site where religious and political subjectivities converged. However, unlike Hindu right-wing *things* that were mass-produced, objects in the spaces of my Zionist settler interlocutors (other than Israeli flags) were usually produced on a smaller-scale by *independent* designers and artists in the settlements, making them trendier, fashionable, and more in demand.<sup>175</sup>

### **Transforming Everyday Spaces through Things**

I'd like to begin this subsection by narrating the *stories* of two sets of objects—simultaneous translation devices and saffron cloths.

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As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, in early July 2014, before I arrived in Israel-Palestine, Zionist settler activists of Women in Green had *re-claimed* a hill near the Gush Etsyon junction. Naming it *Givat Oz V'Gaon*, they

<sup>173</sup> And devoid of items of political significance for the Palestinians (flags, images etc.).

<sup>174</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 27 September 2014.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

*seduce and dupe* Hindu girls. Between food, worship, and love, violence is very much a mundane yet special act carried out in the everyday.

Feminist scholars of international relations (Enloe, 1983, 2000; Parashar, 2013, 2014; Cockburn, 2010; Wibben, 2010; Sylvester, 2012, Gentry & Sjoberg 2015; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2015) and feminist anthropologists (Das, 2006, 2008; Nordstrom, 1997, 2002; Scheper-Hughes, 1993, 2003) have long argued that the study of violence, international politics, global processes and how they shape and re-shape subjectivities needs to pay attention to *everyday lived experiences* of politics, violence, war, and conflict. As Cuomo (1996:42, 44) points out, “emphasizing the ways in which war is a presence, a constant undertone, white noise in the background of social existence” can enable theorists to be “attentive to local realities and particularities about war, about violence, and about the enmeshment of various systems of oppression”. Drawing on Pain (2014), Sjoberg and Gentry (2015) argue that everyday violence in all its forms (from militarisation to domestic violence) should be taken as seriously as traditional war by our academic disciplines. “Security takes place in, is impacted by, and impacts the everyday” and it also is shaped and dismantled by the everyday (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2015:358).

I will discuss how the narratives of Hindu right-wing women and Zionist women speak to the disciplines and limits of international relations and gender studies in the conclusion to this thesis; this section, meanwhile, would be incomplete without two points that conclude this section on everyday violence.

First, while *we* focus on *macro-politics* and global processes of the *Israel-Palestine Conflict* (the commonly known *Arab-Israeli conflict/violence*), the *Hindu-Muslim communal divide*, the *ugly face of the world's largest democracy*, the



worked hard to establish an outpost-settlement at this site.<sup>176</sup> One of the most important aspects of this transformation was the rendering of this space as key to pedagogical events of the group. A mammoth waterproof tent was erected outside the small structure (“house”) that was the centre of the site.<sup>177</sup> About a hundred chairs were procured, some with attached collapsible desks (like those in university classrooms). Tables were arranged in front of the chairs and banners and posters were displayed behind them. Notebooks, pens, papers, folders, pencils, and other stationery items were arranged on the tables. Pamphlets, brochures, calendars, and dozens of books on Zionism, Israel, and Judaism were arranged on bookshelves next to the tables. An area for snacks and water was constructed besides the chairs. The space was ready; it was littered with *things* that would enable fruitful educational sessions that commenced in late July 2014. Speakers were selected to lead lessons and attendees began to arrive at this site regularly.<sup>178</sup> All was going well for a few days until the women invited speakers who only spoke Hebrew. Many attendees, either new to Israel and the settlements or visitors from the diaspora, began to complain and lose interest in the sessions. They did not speak Hebrew or were definitely not fluent enough to engage in an academic discussion in the language. They began to skip many events, unsure if they would understand. Similarly older women who mainly spoke Hebrew began to dismiss the events in English. My interlocutors found that this *ordinary* space of education they had *created* was suddenly not enough to hold the interest of *all* their ‘students’. Nadia called a meeting with Dinah and other members of the pedagogical team to discuss the problem and come up with a solution.<sup>179</sup>

<sup>176</sup> See Chapter One, p.14

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 8 August 2014.

<sup>179</sup> Interview with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 12 August 2014.

very bodies that are *making* these wars, conflicts, occupations, and divides stronger by the day disappear from our texts and thoughts. As Gentry and Sjoberg comment on an article I have written –“Perhaps global foci on spectacular violence, obscure how everyday, mundanised images of violence slip into everyday lives, as the Hindu right provides an example of?” (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2015:360; Mehta, 2015). So as the writing of narratives in this section do, we must continue asking – *How does violence feel in the everyday? What does it do? How is it executed? What bodies make this violence and how? How is it that my interlocutors feel most at peace when they are at war?* (Sen, 2008).

Second, Scheper-Hughes (1993) in her phenomenal work—*Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*—coins the term Everyday Violence as daily practices and expressions of violence on levels of the interpersonal, the domestic, and the delinquent. Focusing on the individual and the body’s lived experiences she speaks of the normalization of violence and terror that creates a community-level ethos of violence. While the shadows of Scheper-Hughes’ ethnography are visible in the narratives I present, the bigger question that remains is one that Nordstrom (1997:116) asks – “Can the ontics of violence (the lived experience of violence) and the epistemology of violence (the ways of knowing and reflecting about violence) ever be realistically separated?” Drawing on her work and this question, I argue that each narrative presented here, each story written into these pages, and each experience it encompasses and evokes, individually and collectively, make up the cultures of violence, their language, their praxis, their threat, their execution and their embodiment into the everyday. They also address the larger questions of *how do we know about violence? Who tells us about it? Why and When? How am, I, as a researcher, conveying the ‘realities’ and ‘lived experiences’ of everyday violence to my readers? What are the politics of my*

Dinah, recalling this event, elaborated,

I suggested simultaneous translation. It could make this space *extraordinary* and *special*. It would offer something unique to our visitors and attendees. They didn't have to choose their events; they could be present at all of them. Those who spoke Hebrew could even use this as a time to better their English and those who spoke both could choose what they wanted. We could really transform the way our audience interacted with our teaching. But the other members laughed at me. How are you going to find a translator? How are you going to find the technology we need and all those devices and headphones?<sup>180</sup>

I nodded, noticing that she seemed rather pleased with herself. She continued, I am a translator myself and I know other translators. So I told them, of course we can budget translation and I will do it to begin with. I went to visit an old friend of mine who was a professional translator and I borrowed about twenty of those devices—the simultaneous translation equipment—with the earpiece. I brought them to our next session, and set up everything myself. We placed the devices in a box at the back and explained to people how they could use them. It took a lot of work but eventually, after a few times it worked! Some of the devices didn't work but it was okay; we had enough for then. Nadia and Yehudit then allocated some money for me to buy lots of those *things* and began to pay me a little for the translation work. And you won't believe it, within days, the place changed; more people came, we didn't have to care if the speakers were going to talk in Hebrew or English—the comments and questions could be in either language—those little

*narratives of these narratives?* Questions that I address in *Chapter Two* but questions I (we) must ask every single time we write about everyday violence.

#### 6.4 Violent Practices, Violent Bargains

Having elaborated on the language of violence and the notion of everyday violence by right-wing women, I now want to explore how violence becomes crucial negotiations and “bargains with patriarchy” within these movements (Kandiyoti, 1988). As the political contexts of the two movements differ in crucial ways (with one being a settler colonial project and the other one *wanting* to espouse settler colonial policies and practices within cultural nationalism), I would like to diverge in this section. Instead of elaborating on broader themes of these bargains, I will, thus, offer brief analyses of these negotiations and dynamics in each movement.

For Hindu right-wing women, violence is crucial to negotiating their identities, their gendered roles, their place within the movement, and their position within the country. Bargains and negotiations thus take place at different levels—from the home to the street to the nation. There are three sites of bargaining that I identify as most significant—masculinity and femininity; funding for their organizations; and mobility and role in the movement. I will now elaborate on each of these.

Aastha was a thirty five year old woman I met through some other interlocutors in Mumbai. She was a mother of two and had the energy of a child; you would find her running around from one task to another without a trace of tiredness. Aastha was also one of my Hindu right-wing interlocutors who took the physical aspects of the training camps with utmost and great

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<sup>180</sup> Interview with Dinah, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 21 August 2014.

devices gave us so much freedom and made us even more successful. I mean, think about it, you wouldn't understand half of what is happening here without the simultaneous translation *thingies* in your ear. Your Hebrew is not good enough yet. This whole classroom experience transformed and all because of my idea and these cheap and easy gadgets. When they work, they really work!<sup>181</sup>

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The annual seven-day Konkan region educational camp of *Durga Vahini* was held in a school in Kalyan, a satellite town of Mumbai. As I entered this space, the first thing I noticed was the fluttering of saffron cloths. Saffron, the Hindu right-wing's adopted colour, brightened the dull grey school building. Like any other middle-class school in India, the space had a large playground in the middle, parapets and long corridors on all sides, never-ending staircases, and windows and doors of classrooms covered with rusty metal bars. Had it not been for the saffron everywhere, I would have been drenched in dismal memories of my own schooldays. Saffron banners welcomed participants; saffron cloths wrapped themselves around decorative balloons as well as my interlocutors' bodies; saffron sashes laced the portraits of *Bharat Mata* and fierce Goddesses; saffron was the colour of the flags of *Durga Vahini*.<sup>182</sup> My interlocutor Veena was overseeing the registration desk. Girls queued up in front of her; she checked their names, gave them a room number and a detailed schedule of activities, recited some basic instructions, took away their mobile phones, and handed them a saffron flag and a saffron sash.<sup>183</sup>

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Fieldnotes, Kalyan, India, 5 May 2014.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

seriousness—she could climb walls and ropes; she had a black belt in karate (which she got when she was twenty); and she was very proud of being able to use a sword and handgun. Aastha was also very keen to *patrol* the 'other' and direct violence at their homes and communities.<sup>579</sup> In a surprising confession, Aastha told me that her husband was a "very non-violent and peaceful type man".<sup>580</sup> She was ashamed of his deep-rooted objection to violence by women *and* men and she thought him effeminate and less than a "real man".<sup>581</sup> In an emotional moment during our conversation, she blurted out,

I taunt him a lot, you know. One day I gave him bangles, my red bangles, and I told him – here you wear these, you are only capable of sitting at home and wearing bangles. Then another day, I told him why don't you make the *chapattis* (flat breads) since you don't know how to be a man. He knows I am joking so he doesn't get angry.<sup>582</sup>

I wasn't sure she was joking and neither was she, nor her husband.

Aastha's example, although extreme in her tone and her fearlessness of the male head of the household, was not isolated. Women in the Hindu right-wing used *their* violence to often push and taunt the men in their homes and the movement and commanded them to get *manlier*. They also often used their own examples of violence to take digs at men pointing out explicitly to the "*impotency of the male politicians and leaders of the opposition who stand there while Muslims, terrorists, and Pakistanis come and rape them and all of us in the ass*".<sup>583</sup> Women's violence, thus, while altering the configurations of femininities for the women themselves, also worked hard to reinforce

<sup>579</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 7 and 8 April 2014.

<sup>580</sup> Conversation with Aastha, Mumbai, India, 8 April 2014.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid.

<sup>583</sup> Conversation with Sanjana and Manjula, New Delhi, India, 14 February 2014.

The attendees checked into their dormitories, *created* from ordinary classrooms; chairs and tables pushed away and replaced with mattresses and saffron sheets and pillowcases. Girls who were so used to being inside a school building were still visibly excited and nervous about this *extraordinary* time away from home and its comforts. They were also appreciative of the brightness of this space. As Jyoti, a fifteen year old from Vashi, exclaimed, “*It is so orange!!! I love it*”.<sup>184</sup> The day began with a *wake-up call* on the school’s PA system. The girls were to report to the ground and run laps. Orange skies resonated with the saffron flags fluttering *everywhere*.<sup>185</sup>

The morning exercise session was followed by breakfast in a lecture hall adorned with saffron tablecloths. *Bauddhik* (intellectual) sessions then commenced in rooms decorated with imagery of *Bharat Mata*, Goddesses *Durga* and *Kali* perched on lions, the Goddess *Ashthabhuja*, and *Jijabai* as well as framed posters of Laxmibai Kelkar, the founder of the *Samiti*, and Sadhvi Rithambara, the founder of *Durga Vahini*. At the centre of this curation and the room lay a table covered with a saffron cloth. A lamp was lit, its light adding to the orange hues of the room; marigold flowers covered the table. As the lessons proceeded, instructors would point to these images asking the girls to identify the icons and narrate their stories. Thus, under this saffron umbrella, rituals were performed, stories were told, and mythico-histories were constructed and imparted.<sup>186</sup>

The second half of the camp focused on *sharirik* (physical) training. Attendees jumped over hurdles, marched and ran, climbed ropes and nets, used sticks and swords, and practiced martial arts’ manoeuvres in the playground—once

<sup>184</sup> Conversation with Jyoti, Kalyan, India, 5 May 2014.

<sup>185</sup> Fieldnotes, Kalyan, India, 6 May 2014.

<sup>186</sup> Fieldnotes, Kalyan, India, 6 and 7 May 2014.

hegemonic conceptions of masculinity within the home and within the movement. Ironically, these hegemonic masculinities only made sense when juxtaposed with normative ideas around femininity such as wearing bangles and cooking *chapattis* (*flat breads*); femininities that themselves were being challenged with everyday violence. Furthermore, it is important to mention that bargains *within* the household also revolved around violence. For instance, my interlocutors elaborated that they often promised their families (read: husbands) good meals and attention on particular days in exchange for *days and time off* when they could engage themselves in the violence and work for the movement. Like the practices of charity in *Chapter Four*, violent engagement becomes a barometer of *how* involved women are in the larger project. It becomes a way for my Hindu right-wing interlocutors to police each other with rewards and punishment (in the form of exclusion) (Foucault, 1991). Violence, thus, allows Hindu right-wing women to bargain with their husbands (and other male members of the family) for *time off* from domestic duties and facilitate *new* timetables that govern their domestic and political lives and their ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ duties.

As mentioned in *Chapter Three* that examines pedagogy, focussing on violence allows Hindu right-wing women to negotiate for funding and privileges within the larger project. Illustrating the need for training and weapons, my interlocutor Kavita echoed what many others have also said,

If our Goddesses had weapons, we need them too. If they could fight, we want to fight too. How do we fight without some help and weapons?<sup>584</sup>

For Kavita and many others (especially the leaders and organizers of the training camps) women’s violence and its growing significance to the aims

<sup>584</sup> Interview with Kavita, New Delhi, India, 19 February 2014.

again, surrounded by saffron cloths. Theoretical sessions on weapons were held inside the classrooms, away from the oppressive humidity of May. Dozens of rifles, a few pistols, and a heap of *laathis* (bamboo sticks) lay adorned with tiny pieces of saffron cloth tied to them.<sup>187</sup> As Veena said, “*they are custom-made for us. We get them through this Hindutva dealer in Bombay*”.<sup>188</sup> She did not elaborate.

On the final day of the camp, the girls were to march through the city of Kalyan, displaying themselves as right-wing subjects carrying right-wing *things*, marking right-wing urban space. Like a graduation ceremony of sorts, the parade elicited much excitement as the girls got ready. They jokingly fought over the objects they were going to carry—everyone wanting a pistol or rifle or *at least* an image of *Bharat Mata*. They were all to be dressed in white and I watched as they put on make-up and earrings. I listened as they chattered about wanting to be seen at the parade. I sat with them as they rehearsed their right-wing “pro-Hindu and anti-Muslim slogans”.<sup>189</sup> I noticed as their longing to go home was followed by an immense sadness of leaving *new* friends and this *exciting* space. Before they left for the streets to participate in their *public* spectacle of violence, they took turns to pin the saffron sashes on each other. My interlocutors had produced Hindu right-wing subjects that had been *transformed* through this pedagogical experience. They, in turn, had *transformed* the politics of my interlocutors and the social and material landscape of this space. The one thing left of their arriving selves was the saffron cloth sash that they were handed on Day One.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Fieldnotes, Kalyan, India, 9 May 2014.

<sup>188</sup> Conversation with Veena, Kalyan, India, 9 May 2014.

<sup>189</sup> Fieldnotes, Kalyan, India, 10 May 2014.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

and goals of the Hindu nationalist project becomes a bargaining chip for asking for better facilities (and buildings) for their chapters, money for their conferences, workshops, and training camps, finances for their physical training and weapons, and a budget for their overall organizations.<sup>585</sup> As my interlocutor Sanjanaji, the head of the Delhi chapter of *Durga Vahini* said in an interview,

The men have careers also—my husband is a politician, other men are businessmen, engineers, doctors etc.—so it is us women who are doing all the daily work and making sure that Muslims and anti-nationals remain scared to death of the Hindu; so of course we need more money to set up and we need better conditions.<sup>586</sup>

Violence, thus, becomes a mode of bargaining for more funding as well as an elevated status, heightened recognition, increased mobility, and a better position within the movement. Women’s violence allows my interlocutors to travel beyond their neighbourhoods, villages, districts, and even their cities to participate in mobilisations and action. It also ensures that the larger Hindu nationalist project makes room for women—be it by the addition of an independent Hindu Women’s Conference/Hindu Women’s Forum as part of the annual World Hindu Congress<sup>587</sup> or by a serious discussion around the inclusion of a *woman’s cell* in the newly minted male organisation Hindu Defence League.<sup>588</sup> Violence puts my interlocutors on the map and they work hard to ensure that they *stay* there.

<sup>585</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 19 February 2014 and 15 May 2014.

<sup>586</sup> Interview with Sanjana, New Delhi, India, 17 February 2014.

<sup>587</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 23 November 2014; The World Hindu Congress (WHC) is an annual event held in a hotel in a big city. I attended the congress in 2014 in New Delhi, India. See more details about the event here –

<http://www.worldhinducongress.org/events/whc-2014/>

<sup>588</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 5 March 2014; Hindu Defense League (HDL) is a male Hindu youth organization that came together in February 2014 on Twitter. The organization had their first ‘physical’ annual meeting in March 2014 in Delhi. I attended the meeting and

In both the aforementioned narratives, *ordinary things* transform *ordinary spaces* into extraordinary and special sites of pedagogy for right-wing women. The Simultaneous Translation Device produced engaged subjects who could exercise choice in their modes of learning *and* contributing. It also constituted my interlocutors as strategic and forward-thinking subjects who were well versed with technological and linguistic capabilities and *wanted* to engage the audience and *teach*. Moreover, it constituted Dinah, the head of the pedagogy team, as a teacher and planner who *solved* problems and *enabled* political arenas. The saffron cloth transformed an ordinary grey school building into not only a site for right-wing politics but also a *vibrant* space for pedagogical indoctrination. It produced the young girls as *dedicated* and excited members of the right-wing; it enabled processes of learning and teaching; and it constituted my interlocutors as subjects who held—and were being held by—the symbolic power of their discourses.

Offering a scheme to understand how space is socially produced, Lefebvre (1991:39-42) puts forth a triad that contains *representations of space* and *representational space* as two of its axes. The first consists of the conceptualised space of planners, urbanists, architects, designers etc. It provides a concrete guideline of how thought would transform into and enable *action*. The second was the space of inhabitants, which used its objects to enable symbolic manifestations of social practices (Lefebvre, 1991:39-42). Here, I argue, that leaders and organisers of right-wing pedagogical spaces function as architects, conceptualising and designing political and educational spaces, embedding objects to nurture their practices, and using *specific things* to transform these spaces over time (Massey, 2005). Their actions directed the production of right-wing subjectivities. I also argue that Lefebvre's theorisation of representational space is useful to understand how images, material objects, and *ordinary things*—like simultaneous translation devices

Women and their violent roles have always been crucial to the settler-colonial politics of Zionism. The *sabra* woman was to be as physically fit and able as the *sabra* man (Almog, 2000). My conversations with my interlocutor Sarah Nachson in *Chapter Three* make it clear that that Zionist settler women enabled the settlement of *Kiryat Arba* and Hebron. In the politics of right-wing settler colonialism, where the 'other' is a *constant* threat, violence is expected and justified. In Israel, where military service is mandatory and war is deeply engrained in society and culture, violence is normalised (Natanel, 2016). At the 'frontier' where my interlocutors live, violence is seen as *a part of living* and preparation to fight is not an expected skill but necessary one. However, while violence may be the norm for Zionist settler women, 'Jewishness', spirituality, and respectability in the upkeep and preservation of tradition are also seen as indispensable. These invariably enforce patriarchal control and gender regimes and it is at these sites where women use violence as means of bargaining and negotiation.

In *Section 6.2*, I mentioned the importance of clothes and norms of appropriate and religious dressing to negotiations around women's participation in violence. Women opting for trousers and non-traditional/non-religious modes of clothing are becoming increasingly common in the national-religious settler communities that my interlocutors inhabit. Similarly, my interlocutors are also using their involvement in an organisation such as Women in Green to mediate other roles within the domestic/home. Gendered divisions of work in the home—especially cooking, cleaning, parenting—are being re-divided and allocated as women's violence is constructed and portrayed as indispensable to the project of Zionism. The very fact that Nadia conceptualized the organization as a woman' organisation where men were welcome, but only as

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interviewed the leaders of the organization. To know more about HDL, see this - <http://bit.ly/2bf2TJH>



and saffron cloths—placed in these spaces by my interlocutors *take a life of their own* and enable politics through symbolisation and ideation (Lefebvre, 1991:39-42).

### Grandiose Things, Elite Pedagogical Spaces

As I elaborated in *Section 3.2*, pedagogical strategies of right-wing women witness divisions along lines of elitism and class. As practices of education transform—and are transformed by—these divisions, I argue that *things* play a crucial role in the production of these spaces and the subjectivities of those present.

In the “overly-intellectual” Zionist settler educational evening that I attended in Jerusalem, a sense of elitism and class promulgated through the materiality of the setting.<sup>191</sup> The gated building (that had the aura of a fancy hotel), the grand elevator leading right into the penthouse apartment, the ornate home suffused with expensive art, figurines, furniture, and fabrics, and the host—adorned with designer wear and jewellery—graciously yet politely greeting the guests and offering them chilled flutes of white wine and fresh juice, all set the tone for the evening. As we adjourned to the large balcony/terrace to begin our political discussion amidst cheese and fruit served on exquisite platters and marble-top tables, the sun was setting over Jerusalem. The sensory encounter with the orange hues of the sky, the softness of dusk, the gentle swaying of the plants around us, and the chirping of birds *only* made possible through the location of this balcony/terrace and our host’s material position.<sup>192</sup> Grandiose material *things* had enabled affective experiences and together, the two, had shaped and invigorated the intellectual discussion, producing subjects that *felt* important in their political movements and social

<sup>191</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 3 September 2014.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

guests, is an example of how settler women are drawing boundaries around gender roles and regimes. Elaborating on this, Nadia told me time and again that the *women only* status of the organisation was not exclusionary but only so women had control over what went on in *their* organisation.<sup>589</sup> As she once remarked,

I started it as an open organization even though the name had Women in it. We had a first meeting and it was just a few women but then a man showed up and the first things he wants is someone to make him coffee. I was like this is it—this is a woman’s organization.<sup>590 591</sup>

Nadia remarks solidified how Zionist settler women mediated gender roles and positions *within* and *outside* the home, with women’s violence tipping the balance of these negotiations.

Kandiyoti (1988) defines patriarchal bargains as women’s strategies within sets of constraints that are concrete. She argues that various forms of patriarchy provide women with different types of rules for patriarchal games. Women, thus, deploy a myriad of strategies to maximize their security and life options within these rules and games (ibid.). While Kandiyoti’s work focuses on how women display active/passive resistance to escape and minimize oppression within patriarchal dominance, it also finds relevance in the lives of right-wing women. As women negotiate and bargain with patriarchal systems (within home, within religion, within the larger political movements of Hindu nationalism and Zionism), they use violence as a form of resistance. Violence solidifies their roles, provides them with mobility and prominence—and like in Kandiyoti’s study—maximizes their security and life

<sup>589</sup> Fieldnotes, London, United Kingdom, 20 October 2014.

<sup>590</sup> Interview with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 8 August 2014.

<sup>591</sup> Nadia has elaborated in conversations with other researchers as well. See Jacoby, T. (2005). *Women in Zones of Conflict: Power and Resistance in Israel*. Montreal, Ithaca: NY, Chesham: McGill-Queen’s University Press

circles and saw themselves *worthy* of this encounter. Subjects, who then also felt the need to respond to this grandiosity by being articulate, saying the *right* things, carrying themselves with impeccable style and poise, making small-talk about their luxurious vacations, and dressing in polished ways.<sup>193</sup>

In a similar vein, the World Hindu Congress of November 2014, a massive pedagogical event catering to elite upper class members of the Hindu right-wing movement,<sup>194</sup> inspired feelings of worthiness and superiority amongst its attendees through the materiality of the setting. Held at a famous five-star hotel in New Delhi, the entrance to the congress displayed an elaborate arrangement of flower petals spelling out – *Welcome Delegates. World Hindu Congress 2014*.<sup>195</sup> Antique oil lamps were lit and placed next to the flowers. Hotel staff and volunteers at the congress were present everywhere to *serve* the needs of the attendees. Upon registration, all attendees were given a *kit*. The kit was a fancy black bag that contained several items—hardbound saffron books on the conference, detailed programmes, speaker biographies, published volumes of essays on Hindutva, pens, notepads, post-its, USB sticks, power banks, and bags of Indian sweets, dried fruits, and nuts.<sup>196</sup> There were two mementos in this bag—a small pin with *Bharat Mata* and an elaborate piece of an aeroplane covered in gold atop a globe covered in gold. The second piece spoke to the ways of the well-travelled and jet-setting audience. Elaborate meals (Jain and vegetarian food) were served in the lavish and green lawns of the venue and snacks, tea, coffee, water, and fresh juices were made available every two hours.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Including members who were part of the Hindu diaspora.

<sup>195</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 21 November 2014.

<sup>196</sup> Nuts, especially cashews have always been considered a marker of class in gift giving in the Indian context.

<sup>197</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 21 November 2014.

options within patriarchal rules and games. Sadly, simultaneously, violence also excludes those Zionist and Hindu right-wing women who refuse aggression, who display any form of *empathy* for the ‘other’, and who lament the loss of life these political projects entail.

## 6.5 The Violence OF Motherhood

The dichotomy between ‘men’s violence’ and ‘women’s peace’ has been central to early academic discussions (as well as even contemporary popular discourse) on gender and violence. As York (1998:19) elaborates, “historically, conceptions of ‘womanhood’ generally have been used to rally women into peace movements via two hackneyed arguments”. First, biologically deterministic claims about women’s roles as mothers, child-bearers, and nurturers see violence as *innately* antithetical. Second, women’s roles as mothers see them capable of cooperation and care—devalued feminine traits—that can be “revalued” to end violence (ibid.).

This dichotomy and the ensuing discussions have also been crucial to conceptualizing the links between motherhood and violence. Ruddick (1998:214), who has formulated the idea of “maternal thinking”—a political reasoning and practice (not innate or biological) that allows women to commit to values of protection, nurturing, and peace—sees women, their “maternal thinking” as well as their maternal suffering as political acts that establish women as peacemakers. Scheper-Hughes (1998:231) takes Ruddick’s work on motherhood and violence further, arguing “maternal thinking can be summoned during times of war, disruption, and political trauma to produce resignation, accommodation, and acceptance of horrible deaths”. Scheper-Hughes’ assertion speaks to the big silence in Ruddick’s work – *what do we*

The women's conference was held in an elaborate ballroom that was decked with a towering banner of a woman's eye and forehead marked with a bindi; the words *Hindu Women's Conference* written below this visual. Visible from every angle in the room, the banner mirrored the grandiosity and affluence of this setting. The room itself was decorated with fresh flowers and lit lamps. Every *thing* in this space mediated the production of the right-wing woman subject, who felt important and *deserving* of this pedagogical site and the intellectual conversations it contained. And like the select elite Zionist settler women, the opulence of this site also necessitated that Hindu right-wing women behave in certain ways and display the most lavish of their saris, jewellery, purses, and gadgets. Ironically, as my interlocutors bolstered a pedagogy of hatred and violence against the Muslim 'other', the walls of *their* ballroom, like those of other grand hotels in India, were adorned with gigantic, extensive, and intricate Mughal paintings. The grandiose artwork looked *down* at my interlocutors as they designated the Mughals as the "invaders of a Hindu India" and swore to obliterate all traces of a Muslim past and present in 'their' land.<sup>198</sup>

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In this section, I have provided a brief ethnographic account of '*things*' in right-wing women's pedagogical spaces. Butler (1997, 2006a) and Foucault (1990, 1991) have both asserted that the subject is produced out of discourses that are both symbolic and material. This section has highlighted how material objects littered the *everyday* in meaningful and precise ways, transformed the *ordinary* and its potential, and contributed to the construction of the *grandiose*. The materiality of objects and the relationships of *things* and

<sup>198</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 21, 22, and 23 November 2014.

*make of women who send their sons to war willingly? Of women who help with war? Of women's wombs that work hard to produce soldiers? Of women who celebrate war victories and grieve losses as maternal martyrs? What both these excellent scholars do not address in their works is a bigger question – What do we make of women, even mothers, who wage violence?*

Addressing the questions around women's political violence, Gentry and Sjoberg (2007, 2015) point to three narrative techniques that are used to frame and construct violent women and their violence as well as marginalize their agency—mothers, monsters, and whores. "These narratives define what violent women are (less than women, less than human, crazy, sexualized or controlled) but they also define what all women are (peaceful, incapable of violence, and in the personal rather than political sphere)" (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015:23). Gentry and Sjoberg's crucial and critical feminist research as well as work by several other feminist international relations' scholars has re-shaped the debate on motherhood and violence—moving away from questions around women's roles as peacemakers (and their incapability for violence) to discussions on representations, actions, and politics of women who engage in violence (Enloe, 2000; Sylvester, 2012; Parashar, 2014).

To elaborate, women's political violence continues to be seen as emotional and a "perversion of the private realm" instead of a 'rational' political act (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015:72). Motherhood becomes a (if not *the*) defining feature of these representations with the idea that women's violence can be 'explained' by their ineffectual motherhood and their inability to be mothers (and hence *even* woman). Violent women are thus, either placed into the "nurturing mother" category or the "vengeful mother" category (ibid.:73). The nurturing mother is a non-threatening violent woman who operates within what Elshtain (1987:50) calls a "field of honour". She uses violence to

subjects, thus, facilitated and strengthened right wing women's pedagogy and politics.

I'd like to end this section with a visual that cements this conclusion and also points to the *traveling* and often embodied nature of material *things* as they interact with my interlocutors, their politics, and the larger political processes engulfing their subjectivities. In this image (Figure 3.9) my interlocutor, Rafela, showcases a t-shirt she designed at a specialist store, one she wears to *every* educational session she convenes and leads. Mingling well-known and trendy symbolisms and catch phrases of global capitalism, neoliberalism, and consumerism with her political goals, Rafela's t-shirt attracts nods, smiles, comments, and complements. This *ordinary* everyday *thing* also transforms her, the teacher and educator, into an inspired and motivated agent, always ready to *just do it*, and her pedagogical practices and spaces into those that are *trendy*, decipherable, and appealing to various audiences. It travels with her, turning from a garment into an embodied political poster.



Figure 3.9: Israel: Just Do It <sup>199</sup>

<sup>199</sup> My interlocutor Rafela gave me permission to compose and use this image; as per her request her face has been made unrecognizable with the use of shadows and light. Image taken by author on September 2014.

protect, to sacrifice herself, to follow through on her instinctual desire of nurture; and she participates in violence in mostly secondary roles (assistance, cooking and providing a home, carrying and transporting explosives etc.). On the other end of this domesticated violent woman, there is the vengeful mother. "The vengeful mother is driven by rage because of maternal losses, maternal inadequacies or maternal incredulity. Her decision is not calculated retaliation but emotion-driven revenge" (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015:75). The suicide bomber—barren, childless, and loveless—and the Medea—irrational, feminine, and crazily in love—are often represented by this second set of narratives.

In the introduction to this thesis (*Chapter One*), I presented a review of the bodies of literature on right-wing women. As I mentioned clearly, right-wing women's politics and violence has often been 'explained' and justified by the use of tropes, representations, and narratives that dwell on motherhood and the familial. Much like the abovementioned representations of motherhood, the right-wing woman is seen as violent *only* to obey/follow her husband/brother/father/son and to fulfil her role as a mother and a wife. Even when possessing agency, she is seen as using her family and motherhood for a politics that only furthers her role as a dutiful mother and wife. In the case of the Hindu right-wing movement, analyses on gender and cultural nationalism have 'explained' the roles and participation of women using the often-repeated narratives of the 'nurturing mother' on women and violence (Sarkar & Butalia, 1998). A handful of women (like Rithambara and Prachi) who *stand out* with their violence and leadership are seen as the vengeful mothers—the celibate, the widows, the unmarried, the barren—who can only be so violent because they are dissatisfied and irrational women/wombs (ibid., 1998). Zionist women settlers are also either placed into these two categories or seen as those who instrumentalize their motherhood to further

### 3.5 Conclusion: *Internal Disagreement, Dissent, and Pedagogy*

In September 2014, a week before *Rosh Hashanah*, Women in Green organized a lecture followed by an evening of music at *Givat Oz V'Gaon*. The evening was supposed to be a last evening of fun, relaxation, and dance, before the self-reflexive holiday arrived. As the musicians sang and played the guitar; the outpost-settlement's lights flickered on and off. A group of young women went *backstage* to fix the lights; others danced, clapped, sang, and some, even ended up in tears. As the music winded down, Rachelle Frenkel, the mother of Naftali Frenkel, one of the three boys who was killed in June 2014, came up the front to speak.

Rachelle, who was a regular at this site, was dressed in a flowing red skirt, a red headscarf, and long earrings, standing out as dazzlingly elegant. She thanked everyone for their support and presence at the site; the audience, mostly women and their children, applauded with emotion. Flanked on either side by her two young children, Rachelle then delivered a brief lecture on forgiveness; she drew on scripture and spoke about exonerating those who committed crimes.<sup>200</sup> She tapped into her grief and made a case for shedding anger and resentment. Pointing to her efforts in *reaching out* to the Palestinian mother whose child was burnt alive in East Jerusalem in July 2014, Rachelle proclaimed that loss, everywhere, was the same.<sup>201</sup> She ended her tearful lecture by asking the audience,

If living here means losing our children and worrying about them every single day, then why should we live here?<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 18 September 2014.

<sup>201</sup> See more on this here: <http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-1.602939>

<sup>202</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 18 September 2014.

violent spatialities and actions. Neuman (2000:20-73), in her work on settlers in *Kiryat Arba* and Hebron, elaborates in detail on maternal mobilization, maternal loss, and the use of motherhood and the domestic to further settler colonial politics and violence. Jacoby (2005:106) also understands motherhood and especially maternal bereavement as crucial to national-religious politics of settler women in Israel-Palestine.

To add to these on-going and engaging discussions on motherhood and violence, I'd like to put forth two points. First, Gentry and Sjoberg's (2007, 2015) work alongside ethnographies by scholars like Neuman (2000) and Jacoby (2005) dispel and completely dislodge the idea that women of the right-wing are merely violent because of their incomplete or protective motherly duties. In my case studies, my interlocutors have clearly demonstrated that they join the movement, construct their projects, bargain for mobility and empowerment, demonstrate agency, and engage in violence for various reasons—political and personal—*just like the men*. The very fact that the women Neuman (2000) and Jacoby (2005) speak of and speak to understand the potential of their motherhood, and instrumentalize their maternal and familial fields to fulfil political objectives *is* an assertion of the agency and 'rationality' of my interlocutors' decisions. Decisions that by the virtue of *being decisions* counter all the traditional arguments about motherhood and violence.

Second, this project was conceived as a step away from the maternal and familial politics of right-wing women. While my ethnography has definitely taken my research and me out of these domestic fields, the domestic continues to linger through this project. In the beginning, as I examined the narratives from my fieldwork, I asked – *How can we do away with the domestic when it still forms a core part of the subjectivities of right-wing women?* However, as I write

The audience was silent; women surrounded her with hugs when she finished. Sarai, who was standing next to me as we listened to Rachelle, pulled me aside in a hurry. When Rachelle had been speaking, I had sensed that Sarai was flinching. So when Sarai said that something was bothering her immensely, I wasn't surprised at all. She hesitated for a bit and then finally confessed, "*I don't agree with her lecture at all*".<sup>203</sup> As I waited for more, she added,

And there are many of us who don't. We just need her so we keep quiet. How can she say we should leave this place? Shall we just give away everything to our enemies? And if we move, where do we go? They [Arabs] will chase us; they won't leave us alone. Should we keep running then? I don't know how she can say such things. I guess I have to tolerate her.<sup>204</sup>

In November 2014, I was reminded of my (brief) conversation with Sarai at the Hindu Women's Conference. On the second day of the conference, Dr Alaknanda Ashok, an invited speaker, a scientist, and a professor, spoke at length about the role of Hindu women in Science and Technology. She elaborated on the lack of participation of Hindu women in the fields of science, presenting facts, figures, charts and graphs, as well as her own experiences of sexism. She gave an impressive talk, arguing for a stronger inclusion of *Hindu* women in Indian laboratories, research organizations, and universities.<sup>205</sup> Although the talk was well received by the audience, in the session that followed, the head of the *Samiti*, Shantakaji, decided to voice an intense criticism of Dr Ashok and her lecture.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Conversation with Sarai, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 18 September 2014.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 22 November 2014.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

these narratives and *witness* how my interlocutors have redefined and mediated the domestic through their politics, this question changes. I now ask – *what are the missed modalities and materialities of this new domestic inhabited by right-wing women?* In honouring this second question, I'd argue that the one discussion on motherhood and violence that has been silenced in previous work on right-wing women is an examination of the violence of motherhood. To elaborate, I'd like you to accompany my writing to my 'fieldsite' in Israel-Palestine and to the home of my interlocutor Sarah Nachson.

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Sarah, a soft-spoken woman in her seventies, had been crucial to the settlement of Hebron and Kiryat Arba in the Southern West Bank. Her mobilizations in the 1960s and 1970s and her sustained pedagogical, charitable, and social endeavours deemed her as extremely relevant to Zionist settler women's activism. Having met Sarah, Sarah's husband, and their large family (17 children and 96 grandchildren as of 2014) on a few occasions in Kiryat Arba, I arrived to stay in their home on a Friday morning in August 2014. Sarai and the Abrahams had invited me to spend Sabbath with them in Kiryat Arba. However, Sarai's ailing husband and the Abrahams' small home rendered them unable to 'host' me in entirety. So the Nachsons volunteered to accommodate me. As is tradition, I presented a bunch of beautiful yellow flowers to them as I entered their *private* space. The living room, oscillating awkwardly between religious and bohemian, had a synagogue at one end and colourful sofas at the other. The walls were littered with bright paintings that Sarah's husband, Rabbi Nachson, a bearded old man who was both a rabbi and a painter had created over the years.<sup>592</sup> The paintings carried symbols and references from Judaism but "aim to take the viewer into a higher plane of

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<sup>592</sup> Fieldnotes, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 29 and 30 August 2014.



In this very public platform, a senior leader of the Hindu right-wing women's project denounced another (junior) member, urging women in the audience not to follow Dr Alaknanda Ashok's call to join the sciences, but instead to continue to retain their softer and feminine selves. Not only did Shantakaji alter the planned programme, ignoring her own chosen lecture topic, but she also did not elicit any comments (or criticisms) from the audience, women remained quiet, listening to the barrage of disparagement.<sup>207</sup>

These two narratives allow me to make four points about disagreement and dissent in right-wing women's pedagogical spaces. First, I want to highlight that pedagogy—with its inherent focus on debate, discussion, and (un)learning—is rendered as one of the key spaces where *internal* disagreements and conflicts of right-wing women's organizing surface. Second, as the two narratives highlight, the disagreement and dissent in my interlocutors' organizations, networks, and friendships took on both forms—hushed whispering and concealed glances as well as vocal and very public criticism. The modalities of disagreement, thus, paid close attention to power equations, hierarchies, visibilities, and spatial and social structures and settings of a pedagogical session. Most importantly, barring the occasional emotion outburst, they were dependant on strategic thinking and praxis.

To elaborate, in the aforementioned narrative, Sarai's disagreements with Rachelle's espousal of forgiveness and leaving were strong. Sarai *could not believe* that a woman who had lost so much to *the Arabs* would forgive *them* and *even* meet *an Arab mother*. Interestingly, Sarai alluded that the leaders of Women in Green, Nadia and Yehudit, as well as several other members agreed with her criticisms of Rachelle. However, not one of them contradicted

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<sup>207</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 22 November 2014.

spiritual unease and frenzy".<sup>593</sup> My room was behind the living room. It was simple and cosy—a single bed, a bookcase, a wardrobe, a desk, a large window, and colourful cushions and blankets. Excited to see a desk, I took out my 'fieldwork' notebook and my Hebrew textbooks, hoping to catch up on some documentation as well as homework later in the night. Sarah touched my hand and said gently,

Don't mind me saying this, but Sabbath is not a time to create anything new; you can read but don't write. It is not a time to make energy, to learn new things; it is time to revisit old lessons. So don't write or study after it begins this evening.<sup>594</sup>

I nodded, feeling terrible about my insensitivity and ignorance.

After I was briefed on other rules of Sabbath, Sarah informed that I didn't have to worry about the lack of light or hot water. They, like many others, *got past* the Sabbath restrictions on light and heat by installing automatic switches and hotplates and water heaters that were wired to turn themselves on and off without the touch of a hand. I was then shown the rest of the apartment. Sarah and her husband had separate rooms, near to mine, and there was another guest bedroom at the back. The bathroom was spacious and filled with bottles of salts and beauty products from the Dead Sea. On the other end of the house was the Rabbi's study—full of books, newspaper cuttings, political cartoons, a collection of pipes, boxes of tobacco, and dozens of tiny miscellaneous items.<sup>595</sup>

I followed Sarah into the big kitchen—cupboards and scores of jars, two large refrigerators, a dining table and chairs, the Sabbath hotplate, two sinks (one

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<sup>593</sup> Conversation with Rabbi Nachson, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 29 August 2014.

<sup>594</sup> Conversation with Sarah Nachson, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 29 August 2014.

<sup>595</sup> Fieldnotes, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 29 and 30 August 2014.

Rachelle. Instead, Rachelle was routinely invited to speak at educational events; she became the face of Women in Green, elegant and grieving, the national mother who embodied the Zionist cause and the threat to Jewish lives. Disagreements with Rachelle were aired out in *private*, finding a voice only in the presence of close trustworthy friends or the outsider, the researcher, me. Furthermore, my conversations with Rachelle did not reveal any knowledge of these criticisms on her part.<sup>208</sup> On the other hand, Shantakaji's disapproval and disagreement with Dr Ashok's opinions and research was not concealed. Fully aware of her status and power as the matriarch of the movement, she was loud, angry, strong, and even hurtful with her words. However, interestingly, while she spoke publically, the same women who had appreciated Dr Ashok's lecture (and Dr Ashok herself) remained silent, quietly disagreeing with their matriarch without saying a word.<sup>209</sup>

Third, while these two narratives have highlighted *negative* aspects of disagreement, pointing to mechanisms of silencing, I must also mention that debate was also encouraged in pedagogical sessions. However, this was limited to certain types of sessions (smaller group discussions, book clubs, meetings etc.) and was fairly contained and structured. Fourth and final, these disagreements dispel the idea that the right-wing is a unified singular apparatus and that right-wing women are monolithic. Right-wing women's organizing contains a multitude of narratives, *intersectional* positionalities (dependant on location, class, caste etc.), hyphenated identities, and multiple lives; their everyday politics has dissenting and disagreeing voices, contradictions and contestations, and plural subjectivities. By examining

<sup>208</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 18 September 2014.

<sup>209</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 22 November 2014.

for dairy and one for meat), and three ovens. Friday was a big day for Sarah, as she had to prepare an elaborate Sabbath meal for their family and visitors. She had been in the kitchen since the morning, making traditional food, stews, and dessert, preparing a variety of salads, and baking breads and cookies. My offers to help were met with a stern no. Partly because Sarah, like a grandmother, wished that I, the guest, felt relaxed and pampered. And partly, because as I did not follow the rules of kosher, I might *contaminate* the food.<sup>596</sup> So I sat and we began our conversation.

In 1979, Sarah and a handful of other women from Kiryat Arba moved from their apartments to the Dabouya building, a large complex in the centre of Hebron that was previously used as a clinic. Sarah recalled,

Many men had tried to negotiate with the government and military to take back our buildings and land. But all they managed to do was get a synagogue opened. Nothing more.<sup>597</sup>

She added,

So there were us, about fourteen-fifteen mothers, we had some thirty five-forty children in total, and we just decided to go there and claim it by living there. We took mattresses, some clothes, some containers of water, a small fridge, and a portable toilet and of course, our children's books and toys. And we just went there and lived, day after day, without electricity, without proper water, without windows, without light.<sup>598</sup>

The military hesitant to use force against women and especially against children (well, Israeli children) let them stay there. Sarah kneaded the *challah* as we talk. *Roll. Knead. Roll. Knead.* I waited.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid.

<sup>597</sup> Conversation with Sarah Nachson, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 29 August 2014.

<sup>598</sup> Ibid.

sites/practices of pedagogy (among others), feminist scholarship can begin to understand the complexities of right-wing women.

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This chapter has highlighted the intricacies, potential, and *everyday politics* of right-wing women's pedagogy. Examining narratives from Hindu right-wing and Zionist settler women, I have argued that education—its theory and praxis—was not always a *natural* or *innate* virtue embodied by right-wing women; instead, it was a self-imposed, laborious, and strategic effort that involved planning, decision-making, and implementation of a host of pedagogical practices, performances, and narratives. By examining the relationships between right-wing women and their pedagogical audiences, this thesis has foregrounded how my interlocutors fashion themselves as teachers and shape the subjectivities of the *students* they encounter. Furthermore, the extensive aesthetic content appropriated and constructed by Hindu right-wing and Zionist settler women, its ritualization and performance, and its pervasiveness have highlighted that right-wing women often establish alternative 'feminine' (if not feminist) discourses of nationalist and settler colonial ideology giving supreme importance to female figures, warrior motherhood, and women-centric symbols, often disagreeing with male ideologues and members. These discourses are both symbolic and material; this chapter has provided a brief ethnographic account of *things* in educational spaces of right-wing women, furthering the understanding of how my interlocutors' politics intersect with material objects. Finally, this chapter has argued that right-wing women's everyday politics contain a host of disagreements, debates, and dissent; these illustrate the non-monolithic nature of my interlocutors' subjectivities and also centre pedagogy as a crucial site for subject formation.

She continued,

Whenever they used to come to evict us, we would set the children on them. They would run around and play with the soldiers. There was no way the soldiers could use their guns on our forty-fifty children.<sup>599</sup>

Days turned into weeks and the women lived there for over a year, the children exposed to horrendous and unhealthy living conditions, infections and diseases, the threat of violence and gunfire, and the lack of schools, playgrounds, day care, healthcare, and extended family, relatives, and friends. As she lined a tray with a baking sheet and put the bread into the hot centre of the oven, she seemed satisfied with her usual Friday creation.<sup>600</sup> She smiled at me and said,

Life becomes routine. I bake this bread every week. And we lived there, day after day. You get used to it. We told the government, you gave away Sinai; now don't let Hebron go. Just give us this and we will forgive you for Sinai.<sup>601</sup>

The Israeli government relented and the settlers from Kiryat Arba took over the building, renaming it *Beit Haddasah*. The building became the centre of the subsequent settlement of Hebron, by approximately 450-500 violent settlers.<sup>602</sup>

As the evening neared, Sarah sped up. She chopped, boiled, sprinkled, and sautéed with great efficiency. She took breaks to feed me as well as many of her wandering grandchildren, clean the kitchen, lay out dishes, and organize things. *Chop. Splat. Simmer. Wipe. Mop. Wash. Plop. Bang.* Soon Sarah would

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<sup>599</sup> Ibid.

<sup>600</sup> Fieldnotes, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 29 and 30 August 2014.

<sup>601</sup> Conversation with Sarah Nachson, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 29 August 2014.

<sup>602</sup> On a day that I wasn't doing 'fieldwork' I went up to Hebron with two of my dearest Palestinian friends from Ramallah to visit another friend. We walked around the old city, reaching the *last* Palestinian house, next to the Beit Haddasah building. The families in this *last* building could not open their windows as settlers threw stones and garbage at them from the Beit Haddasah building. I recall this to assert how crucial this space was and still remains to the settler occupation of Hebron.

## The 'Good' and 'Moral' Female Subject: Charitable and Humanitarian work and/of Right-Wing Women

### 4.1 Introduction: The 'Rules' of Goodness

"Where have you reached? Why don't you get off the *rickshaw* and walk down the street.... Do you see the small lane on right side of the big temple? There is a school just after the temple but turn before you reach the school. When you walk down that lane you'll see a few houses and then you'll see another big temple. Go into the door on the side of the temple. Look for the board that says Family Counselling Centre.... Do you see it? The door will be closed but won't be locked. Go through the door and go up the stairs and you will see an office opposite. That is the office of our orphanage and adoption centre. Once you reach there, tell them you are here to see Ashaji and sit and wait for me. I am running late but it is better you sit in our orphanage than wait on the street for me. This area and neighbourhood is not that safe, even in the day...."<sup>210</sup>

I hung up the phone as I saw the stairs that Ashaji mentioned. After following Ashaji's excellent directions and navigating some of the tinier streets of Delhi that were completely unknown to me, I was here. I caught my breath after climbing up steep grimy stairs and saw the signs to the orphanage and adoption centre's office. Looking up, on the levels/floors above I could see clothes drying, toys strewn about, and signs of a casual clutter that makes a

<sup>210</sup> Telephone Conversation with Asha, New Delhi, India, 24 February 2014.

head for her bath and get ready for the evening. Before she left the kitchen, I managed to muster the courage to ask – *Don't you think the children really suffered that year?*<sup>603</sup> She looked annoyed, put down the dish she was washing, smiled and said,

These were Zionist children, my dear, they know suffering is in our blood and they also know *this* kind of suffering is temporary and is for our land. One day it will stop.<sup>604</sup>

After the evening Sabbath meal at the Abrahams, I began to dwell on Sarah's narratives. I had heard several similar stories from other mothers in the Women in Green. Mothers took their children to violent protests, rallies, and demonstrations. They took them to outposts and settlements, subjecting the children to threats of violence as well as uncomfortable (and sometimes unhealthy) conditions. They encouraged them to hitchhike. They took them along on their *missions* of violence—toddlers and teenagers alike, holding hands with their mothers, while the mother's other hand threw stones at Palestinians.<sup>605</sup> Children were a *necessity* in the maternalist politics of settler colonialism (Neuman, 2000). But children (and here I mean Israeli settler children who were *very* privileged compared to Palestinian children) were also vulnerable and threatened and affected (socially, medically, emotionally) by the actions and will of their mothers. They, in multiple ways, were the victims and subjects of the violence of motherhood.

In no way do I want to ignore or belittle the immense suffering and insurmountable violence faced by Palestinian children at the hands of Zionist settlers and the Israeli occupation. The violence they face at the hands of my

<sup>603</sup> Fieldnotes, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 29 and 30 August 2014.

<sup>604</sup> Conversation with Sarah Nachson, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 29 August 2014.

<sup>605</sup> Fieldnotes, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 29 and 30 August 2014.

home and indicates that lives are being *lived* in these quarters. *Is this a temple? An NGO? A home?* I entered the office, introduced myself to the lady that greeted me. I accepted the kind offer of a chair and a glass of cold water. As I sat down, ready to take out my notebook, a lady from the office approached me. She introduced herself as Vanita, the manager of the orphanage and adoption centre, and handed me a few leaflets and photo albums to browse as I waited.

The centre, as I understood, was part of a larger group of organizations that were considered those of service, social work, charity, and humanitarian work under the Hindu Nationalist umbrella. Run by the movement's members and funded through donations, it had close links with the organization that my interviewee for the day, Ashaji, founded and managed. The office of the organization was big and airy with large windows and lots of sunlight. My nostalgia for the chilly *Delhi winter* had disappeared, as the temperature was unusually high this February. Amid the usual clutter of papers, stationary, and files and folders in bureaucratic offices, there were desks with bulky computers, a meeting area with a round table, an old cloth couch and some chairs for guests and visitors, and an area with a few tables stacked with some refreshments and a water-filter. The walls were the most interesting to me—faded yellow paint with eroding sections covered with two types of pictures and symbols. Hindu nationalist leaders—Gowalkar, Hedgewar, and Savarkar—beamed in their usual poses in large portraits covered with fresh flowers. Alongside these men were framed depictions of *Bharat Mata* (the Mother Goddess), *Durga*, and *Kali*, sans flowers, but shining with colour. A portrait of *Jijabai* with her son, the young prince *Shivaji*, hung nearby, emphatic in its glorification of motherhood. Around these *usual* Hindu Nationalist symbols were scores of pictures of infants, toddlers, and children,

interlocutors has no comparison to the violence *of* motherhood I speak of here. I am also not elaborating on this to generate any sense of *sympathy for* or *empathy with* the children of Zionist settler women and their plight. However, what I *am* positing here is that Zionist settler women's politics *and* the use of motherhood to mediate their political violence renders the child, the offspring, the baby, and the adolescent vulnerable, victimized, and also complicit.

Perhaps the most obvious and crucial point to make here is one that was made by Rachel Frenkel, the mother of Naftali Frenkel—one of the three boys who was killed while hitchhiking in June 2014. With an envelope of sadness, Rachel, who was in mourning, said,

We choose to live here and send our children to schools here. We choose to leave safer and safe places and live and study here for our politics. We expose our children to these dangers because of our will and choice. We tell them to hitchhike. And when they get killed, it is our fault.<sup>606</sup>

The very act of not only *choosing* to live in a site of violence but also *perpetuating* that violence is perhaps the biggest argument for the violence *of* mothering.

I'd like to end this section by mentioning two final points. First, in the Hindu right-wing movement, women too mobilize as mothers and often take their children along to acts of violence as well as volatile and unstable situations. They also enrol their young children into the branches, organizations, and training camps, exposing them not only to physical violence but also to the ideology and practices of violence from a very early age. Second, this

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<sup>606</sup> Interview with Rachel Frenkel, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, 8 September 2014.

sometimes by themselves (although surrounded by toys), sometimes with couples, and sometimes with young women.<sup>211</sup>

Vanita saw me glancing at these pictures and noticed as I walked closer to the walls to inspect them. She approached me and said,

These are our children. The soul of our organization. The ones we work so hard for. Some of them get adopted quickly and we take pictures with the new parents, some don't get adopted at all. And some of the pictures are with the women who care for them. Good young women who come from Hindutva and volunteer with the children.<sup>212</sup>

Vanita's words and the brochures explained that the people that worked here vowed, *"to give every Hindu orphan a Hindu home with loving cultured parents who were moral and could be good providers"*.<sup>213</sup> Vanita further explained that the floors above the office, where I had noticed signs of daily life, were homes where the children lived. *"They had good living conditions"*, she added, *"with beds and running water, toys and books, and a kitchen where volunteers cooked and gave them healthy and nutritious food"*.<sup>214</sup> She continued,

We have some women who live with the children and take care of them every day, especially the babies and the young ones who need a lot of care. These women have given up their own family life for the larger *samaaj* (society) and *sewa* (service) and are devoted to these children and the orphanage. We also have many women who come during the day and work with the children—taking them to school,

discussion, however brief, is an attempt to further nuance the academic discussions on motherhood and violence, insisting that the two are not merely separate (and definitely not far-apart) ends of a spectrum. They are also not simply a means of reasoning and justification for political violence by women. Motherhood and violence are *also* intricately connected in a hideous relationship that perpetuates settler colonialism and cultural nationalism through the generations, one that can be termed the violence *of* motherhood.

## 6.6 Conclusion

*"How is it that we can find references to courage, sacrifice, heroism, cowardice, despair, grief, angst, anger, suffocation, laughter, parody, longing, love, hate, disgust, horror, fear, pain, suffering, in fact, every conceivable kind of emotion or disposition as part of the experience of violence?"* (Das, 2008:284)

Das asks a crucial, if not *the* most crucial question about violence. How can violence evoke and encompass such a multitude of symbolic, material, and affective realities? This chapter has examined the narratives of violence of Hindu right-wing women and Zionist settler women to address Das' question. It has connected the different themes of this ethnography—pedagogy, charity, leisure and friendship, and aggression—through the strong undertone of violence. It has allowed my interlocutors in two disparate geographies to converge and diverge, their stories contributing to the larger study of right-wing women. In *Section 6.2*, I have examined the language of violence, arguing that right-women strategically construct a verbal, textual, and visual imagery that necessitates and justifies their violence and establishes them as *queer* subjects. In *Section 6.3*, I have elaborated on the *ordinariness* of violence, highlighting the modalities of everyday violence and

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<sup>211</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 24 February 2014.

<sup>212</sup> Conversation with Vanita, New Delhi, India, 24 February 2014.

<sup>213</sup> Brochure, Hindu Orphanage and Adoption Centre, handed to me by Vanita, New Delhi, India, 24 February 2014.

<sup>214</sup> Conversation with Vanita, New Delhi, India, 24 February 2014.



cooking the meals, and playing with them in the evening. They are all one big family.<sup>215</sup>

While the orphanage required the most infrastructure and funding, the bigger project was the adoption centre. The organization worked with a small team of lawyers and social workers to find suitable homes and families for the children. As Vanita added, “*every child deserves a good Hindu family. Currently, we only place our children in homes in India and in Hindu homes only*”.<sup>216</sup>

Having heard the word *Hindu* a few times, I decided to take my chances and quiz her further on this selective idea of *what/who* constitutes a family *worthy* of adoption. Hesitantly, and rather meekly, I asked,

Why don’t you consider families from other religions? Does religion really matter? Doesn’t it matter more that the parents are loving and responsible?<sup>217</sup>

There was a slight awkward silence and I worried I had silenced my new interlocutor irreparably. But then she patted me on the back and said,

Religion matters because *these* are Hindu children. They have been raised as Hindus in this orphanage. Even if a Muslim family has abandoned a baby and we find the baby somewhere, not knowing what his origins are, we raise him as a Hindu. From the minute he enters our orphanage he *is* a Hindu and that is his identity. It is the identity of his *ayahs* (nannies) and his teachers and the *didis* (elder sisters) who play with him. His home is in a temple. Inside a sacred and large temple. How can any of these children not be Hindu? No

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

the politics they enable. Looking at how violence becomes a means of negotiation and bargaining by women in the right-wing, in *Section 6.4*, this chapter has examined the transformative potential of everyday violence for my interlocutors. Finally, in *Section 6.5*, I have argued for the need to reconfigure the scholarly debates on violence and motherhood, asserting for the need to examine the violence *of* motherhood.

Through these narratives, I bring this ethnography to a conclusion of discomfort and unease. Throughout this chapter, I have avoided *defining* the term violence. This has been a deliberate move that echoes Nordstrom’s (1997:117-118) crucial words – “Violence is not defined... [The knowledge of violence] is always already in social epistemology- the foundation from which all questions derive, but which itself is not questioned.... In my experience, people are as loathe to accept definitions of violence as they are to ask for them”. What is violence then? An act, emotion, a sensation, a relationship, an intent to harm? A thing, an event, a concept, a process, a force? An intangible force? A tangible threat? Something physical or emotional? Something that is over with the end of the act? Something that renders the term *over* meaningless? Or all of the above? (Nordstrom, 1997:118). Drawing on Nordstrom, I argue that *fixing* a definition of violence would not only be unethical but also impossible. Thus, perhaps, instead of trying to *fix* the *meaning* of violence, a researcher (and reader) must instead search for the *locations* of violence. The ontology of violence is not simply present in military documents, political treaties, macro war histories, and academic textbooks; it is found in the “war-bodies” of Parashar’s interlocutors, in the songs of Nordstrom’s interlocutors, in the friendship of Ferrante’s female characters, and *within* and *in between* the multiple narratives, stories, and silences of my right-wing women interlocutors (Parashar, 2013; Nordstrom, 1997; Ferrante, 2012)

matter where they came from, they live here as Hindus and they must leave as Hindus, so we have to find them Hindu parents.<sup>218</sup>

Vanita didn't realize this but her argument implied that religion was a construct and the religious nation an "imagined community" (Anderson, 2006). The very belief that was justifying the actions and policies of her organization stood in tension with Hindu nationalism's core belief of allegiance to a religion, culture, land, and nation through birth *in* it (Golwalkar, 1939). As I mused over this silently she added,

Also these *mullahs*<sup>219</sup> and Christians, you never know what their intentions are. The Christians will take children and put Bibles in their hand as soon as they do. They will send them to convents and surround them with *Sisters*.<sup>220</sup> And you must have heard how their priests molest and rape young boys even? And the *mullahs*, where to begin. First thing they will do is give the child beef. Imagine! A child who lives in a temple will be eating beef. *Bhagwaan!* (God!) Then they will make him grow into a *mullah*, the girl will be put behind the *burkha* and the boy will be sent to some jihadi type *madrasah*. You tell me – aren't we doing a human thing, a good thing, by not giving our children to these people? Isn't it better if they stay here, even without parents, than end up like this?<sup>221</sup>

I went back to looking at the brochures of the happy children—photographs of kids playing with toys and cricket bats, reading colourful books, posing

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> A derogatory term used in India to refer to Muslims.

<sup>220</sup> Nuns are referred to as *Sisters* in popular Indian discourse.

<sup>221</sup> Conversation with Vanita, New Delhi, India, 24 February 2014; For further reading on the tensions between religion, law, and adoption (and the subversive spaces these open up) see Clarke, M. (2013) Islam And New Kinship: Reproductive Technology and the Shariah in Lebanon

# 7

## Conclusion: Listening to Narratives; Re-Thinking Right-Wing Women

*"Each of us narrates our life as it suits us."*

- Elena Ferrante, 2014  
*Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay*

### 7.1 Re-Visiting the 'Field'

In May 2015, I started making plans to re-visit Israel and Palestine. A geography conference in Ramallah in July 2015 promised to be incredibly exciting and I could combine my participation at the four-day event with a few weeks of *follow-up* research with Zionist settler women. I had spent the previous months in the library, poring over fieldnotes and recordings, locating the themes that would organize this thesis into chapters, and disentangling narratives from the 'field'. I was curious to re-visit my interlocutors and examine the state of the outpost-settlement of Givat Oz V'Gaon. *What if I had missed something? What if going back gave me a different perspective?* I had been in touch with my interlocutors intermittently, following Women in Green's activities through Facebook, their website, and their mailing lists and communicating with Nadia, Sarai, Malka, and Nira through sporadic email and text messages. *Their politics and violence continued, so how could my 'fieldwork' end?*

I wrote to my interlocutors about my plans; their responses were welcoming. Dinah sent me the official list of the educational events organized by Women in Green since I had left. The autumn, winter, spring, and upcoming summer

with *new* families, sitting through prayer ceremonies to mark the auspicious adoptions. I also noticed that alongside all the pictures on the wall there was also a poster of Sadhvi Rithambara—the Hindutva woman leader who started *Durga Vahini* and then gave up on *performing* violent speeches to open a large ‘charity’ in North India that ran an orphanage, an old age home, a hospital, a school, and various other ventures that will be discussed in this chapter. Dressed in an orange sari (her usual outfit) in this picture, her jet black hair combed perfectly, a large *bindi* on her otherwise unadorned face; she smiled, holding a baby in her arms and posing next to three other young children. The epitome of Hindutva women’s charities (and violence), I wondered why her photograph was not the centre of this office.<sup>222</sup>

Ashaji arrived hurriedly as I collected my thoughts. She was a young woman, dressed in a simple brown *salwaar kameez*, wearing glasses, her long hair tied up in a neat plait. Behind her were two children, a boy and a girl, shy and quiet.

I am sorry I am so late, so so very sorry, I hope you didn’t get bored. Did you have tea? These are my children; I had to bring them along today as my mother-in-law has an appointment so she can’t take care of them. That is why I got late, it is so much effort to get these two ready and pack their books and games so they can stay busy the whole day. You know? You must have children na? .... Where is the tea? Can someone bring us some tea? Let us have tea then I’ll take you to our counselling centre and show you what we do for the community.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 24 February 2014.

<sup>223</sup> Conversation with Asha, New Delhi, India, 24 February 2014.

schedules were a mix of lectures on politics, religion, and war. In a talk titled, “*Phantom Nation*,” a female scholar had spoken on the “invention of Palestinians as an obstacle to peace”.<sup>607</sup> Sarah Nachson was to give a lecture on the “renewal of the Jewish community in Hebron” in July.<sup>608</sup> A journalist had just spoken about ISIS and its existence as a threat to Israel. I could plan my visit around the upcoming sessions, Dinah asserted. Sarai told me of the snow they had received and the heated winter tents they had built at Givat Oz V’Gaon. She wrote, “*Things are worse, there have been so many stabbings, we have to be even more vigilant and willing to embrace violence to stay here*”.<sup>609</sup> Malka updated me on her children; she was brief in her emails and promised more details when we met. Nira offered me a place to stay. Nadia sent me links to a few photo albums. I clicked on them and my browser was covered with photographs of smiling faces that were singing, dancing, and rejoicing. A climbing wall for children had been procured and was now a permanent part of the playground at the outpost-settlement. Givat Oz V’Gaon witnessed its first *brit milah* (circumcision ceremony), its first, second, and third wedding, dozens of birthday parties, five concerts, and immeasurable activities for my interlocutors and their children. In the spring, Nadia had arranged for a “zoo day” for children, bringing reptiles and small mammals to the site. A girl smiled, hesitantly, a snake around her neck.<sup>610</sup> My interlocutors sat on swings and benches; they smiled, worked, and talked; the seasons changed.

I booked my flights and sorted out my accommodation and schedule. I put together my documents and headed to the embassy; the Israeli state denied my visa. I appealed the decision; my appeal was denied.

<sup>607</sup> Email exchange with Dinah, 16 May 2015.

<sup>608</sup> Ibid.

<sup>609</sup> Email exchange with Sarai, 9 May 2015.

<sup>610</sup> Email exchange with Nadia, 13 May 2015. These photographs are also on the Facebook page of Women in Green - <http://bit.ly/2cwjw6W>

The aforementioned narrative brings to mind two theoretical works. First, Deeb (2006:198), in her work on piety, volunteerism, and Shi'i Muslim women in Beirut, Lebanon, elaborates on the image of the orphan as a "powerful one, salient for donors and many volunteers". The orphan cannot be held responsible for her condition; no guilt can be attached to her. The orphan had nothing to do with violence and war and "it is indisputable that orphans *need* assistance" (ibid.). The orphan in the narratives of service of Hindu right-wing women becomes analogous to the 'Hindu child' as well as the 'Hindu land'—entities that must be rescued and saved at all times. In Zionist settler women's narratives, the Jewish child and the Jewish land, subjects that either suffer (or are at constant risk of) the loss of a nurturer/parent/loved one, occupy a similar position. Women's charitable efforts in the right-wing, thus, often frame themselves in relation to a fragile and innocent subject, a metonym for the ubiquitous orphan. Second, like the aforementioned narrative, right-wing women's charitable efforts consolidate themselves around racialized issues of human life and death—adoption, healthcare, reproductive care, medicine, education, sanitation, the environment and access to the clean and 'green'—disciplining and regulating vital aspects of human life and deciding who is made to live (and who *deserves* life) and who is left to die (Foucault, 2003:239-263). Social work and service, thus allow, right-wing women to exercise techniques and practices of "biopower" where they become the governing subjects, constructing and controlling the subjectivities of the 'populations' around them (ibid.).

Building on these ideas, this chapter examines everyday practices of charity, humanitarian/social work, volunteerism, and service of right-wing women. Through these practices, I argue, right-wing women engage in three forms of subject formation. First, drawing on the abovementioned discussion of "biopower", these practices allow my interlocutors to "govern" populations

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In December 2015, I headed to India to see my family and friends; it had been a while. I wrote to my interlocutors in Mumbai, Pune, and Thane ahead of my trip, curious to witness their politics in an India with a Hindu right-wing government led by Narendra Modi. I made plans to see them on days I was not sipping *chai* at my favourite café with my close friends; tea and cigarettes with a side of long heart-breaking conversations about the Hindu right-wing government's incursions into universities and daily lives.

I met Veena and Amrita in Thane in late December and we made our way to the *same* bench outside the small temple. They elaborated on all they had been doing in the last year and a half with great excitement and asked me questions about my life in London. *Durga Vahini* had organized eight camps in Mumbai and Kalyan; all were successful and enrolment was the highest it had ever been. Rochana and Roshni were still facilitating the ceremonial aspects of the morning exercises at the camps and Veena was finally *retiring* from her leadership position. Her work at the district court had doubled and she wanted to *enjoy* Hindutva for a few months without worrying about the logistics of organization. The two continued to remain close friends, laughing, gossiping, and teasing each other with unbridled intimacy as we spoke.<sup>611</sup> In January 2016, in Mumbai, I met Geeta, Aastha, and Prabha who informed me that two local branches in the suburbs had been revamped with new and generous funds from the headquarters of *Durga Vahini*. There was new furniture and more money to hold events; their schedule was packed. The *daily walks of violence* still continued, with the state and police turning a blind eye to my interlocutors' aggressive acts.<sup>612</sup> Phone conversations with Sanjanaji and Ashaji revealed that *all was well* in Delhi too. Sanjanaji still headed the

<sup>611</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 18 December 2015.

<sup>612</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 6 January 2016.

around them (Foucault, 2003:138). By occupying (and often filling the gaps in) the sites of state-power and reach, right-wing women use practices of charity to exercise power and inculcate norms through “governmentality”, shaping the political subjectivities of those they encounter (ibid.). Second, through practices of charity, right-wing women actively construct themselves as moral, ethical, and good subjects, rendering these practices as “technologies of the self”—a set of practices that allow the subject to constitute itself as an individual in an active fashion (Foucault, 1988). Third, through governance, self-fashioning, and what Cohen (2001) calls “states of denial”, right-wing women use practices of giving and charity to erase the non-Hindu and Palestinian ‘other’.

With these three broad arguments, this chapter is divided into five sections. In *Section 4.2*, I delve into the quotidian practices of service and charity undertaken by Zionist settler women. Here, I argue that these practices are gendered, inherently violent, and establish norms of giving and goodness and a ‘new’ *visibility* of charity. These norms and visibility allow right-wing women to punish and reward ‘goodness’ and also bargain with gender norms and roles. In *Section 4.3*, I examine ‘special’ practices of Zionist settler women’s charity in times of ‘war’ and argue that times of heightened violence allow for new modalities of fashioning and performance of the subject. Moving onto Hindutva women’s service and social work, in *Section 4.4*, I build on Menon’s (2010) work on everyday nationalism and elaborate on their quotidian and ‘special’ initiatives drawing special attention to the case of Sadhvi Rithambara, the founder of *Durga Vahini* and the face of right-wing women’s charity. Like Zionist settler women, I argue, Hindu right-wing women construct themselves (and govern others) through charity. Following this, *Section 4.5* engages with Cohen’s (2001) work on denial and argues that charity becomes a practice of denying and erasing the other. Finally, to

*Durga Vahini* and organized the camps in the region. She said that the government was giving them full support to clamp down on *love jihad* and beef-consumption; the women had adopted the two issues as their main projects.<sup>613</sup> Ashaji still ran the counselling centre and nothing had changed; funds were low and they remained in the cramped basement fighting male leaders over permissible topics.<sup>614</sup>

The Modi government had emboldened my interlocutors; they felt *safer* and more in *control* of the nation; their violence had been legitimised further. They continued their work, gaining strength and momentum with each day, and my *chai* sessions became more frequent and forlorn.

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My brief (attempt to) ‘return’ to the ‘field’ reiterated the workings of the everyday politics of right-wing women and (sadly) reaffirmed the necessity of this research project and thesis.

Hindu right-wing and Zionist settler women were crucial to their larger nationalist and settler-colonial projects as symbolic and discursive markers and as the *innate* upholders and transmitters of values and culture (Yuval-Davis, 1997; McClintock, 1991). They extended and actively transformed these *prescribed* roles through strategic and laborious practices of pedagogy, establishing alternative ‘feminine’ discourses of the right-wing that drew on iconography, performance, and material objects.<sup>615</sup> As they constituted themselves as teachers, they shaped the political subjectivities of their audiences through their pedagogical content (Menon, 2010). My interlocutors

<sup>613</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, 19 December 2015.

<sup>614</sup> Ibid.

<sup>615</sup> See *Chapter Three*, p.73

conclude this chapter, *Section 4.6* offers an analysis of how charity becomes a site of negotiation and bargaining for right-wing women, constructing them as dissonant and subversive subjects transforming dominant (and male-formulated) discourses of the right-wing as well as gender relations within the home and the larger projects.

## 4.2 Community Service as Norm: The Zionist Settler Women's Quotidian

### Commitment to Charity

Women in Green have a one-line motto—*Eretz Israel Le'Am Yisrael*—The Land of Israel belongs to the People of Israel.<sup>224</sup> As one of the two founders of the organisation, Yehudit, explained to me,

It is a simple statement but with a lot of weight and depth. On one hand there is our overall commitment to establishing a state and life for Jewish people in *Eretz Israel*—including in *Judea* and *Samaria*—a life that is without fear, without terror, and without the kind of oppression and anti-Semitism we, Jews, feel right now. There is a need to realise our dream of a land that is only ours. On the other hand, there is a need to pause and think – *what kind of community do we want to establish here? What kind of life do we want in this land?* And the answers are simple. We want a life where *every Jew, every citizen of Eretz Yisrael*, young and old, new and native, religious, secular, and orthodox, man and woman, children and elderly, is bound together by not just a love for the land but a love and concern for each other, for the community. So we have to do this hand in hand; our struggle for the land will only happen through our love for the community, our giving to the community, our charity, our service and what we can offer, and this

used charitable initiatives (ranging from adoption centres to counselling sessions to planting trees) to fashion themselves as moral and good subjects and deny and erase the 'other' (Cohen, 2001). These practices of charity made their lives, their work, and their everyday politics *visible* (Deeb, 2006). They also allowed them to formulate norms of morality and police their communities (Foucault, 1991).<sup>616</sup> Through spaces and practices of intimacy, Hindu right-wing and Zionist settler women built bonds of friendship, love, care, and community, negotiating movement, migration, and the limits of permissibility. Practices of leisure, pleasure, and fun drew in their communities and audiences and nurtured the intimacies that held their politics together.<sup>617</sup> Everyday violence, often justified and disguised as self-defence, provided a space for mobilisation and bargaining for my interlocutors (Scheper-Hughes, 1993, 2003; Das, 2008; Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015). They embraced a *queer* language of violence, using daily acts of violence as means to gain access to the public, re-shape their movements, and negotiate space within their movements.<sup>618</sup> Violence was the undertone of right-wing women's politics; it was the thread that weaved together my interlocutors' narratives as well as the themes in this thesis.

This thesis has asserted that right-wing women's politics and subject positions are not monolithic; they contain numerous voices, narratives, hierarchies, power relations, exclusions/inclusions, and moments of disagreement and debate. Gender and sex intersect with categories such as class, caste, location, religiosity, race, and ethnicity and processes such as neoliberalism, racialization, urbanisation, globalization, and migration to enable right-wing women's everyday nationalist and settler colonial politics and violence. My

<sup>224</sup> See the *About Us* section on the WIG website - <http://womeningreen.org/about-us/>

<sup>616</sup> See *Chapter Four*, p.158

<sup>617</sup> See *Chapter Five*, p.234

<sup>618</sup> See *Chapter Six*, p.309



work on the ground has to happen in the name of our service to the land and the cause.<sup>225</sup>

Yehudit's words make it clear that social and charitable work is a crucial part in the settler women's 'struggle' for the Jewish land. During my time with the activists from Women in Green, I was told, time and again, that volunteerism and service to the community were the same as *the* fight for the land. It could also be argued that the entire organisation constructed itself as a community service effort and saw no distinction between the charitable work they did and their overall political existence. As Yehudit asserted in the same interview,

How can you be a Jew and not give to the land and the people? You can't even be human if you don't give. We are all here to give back to those around us. Women in Green does exactly that. We give to our people, those who don't try to kill us and those who are committed to the Jewish land. You ask me what kinds of charitable acts we organise, but everything we do is charitable—everything we do every single day, our entire existence, why we are an organisation, why we come together is community service. We provide many services but we ourselves are a service. We are not even paid for this. It is all from within, from the heart, from the body and mind that *H'Shem* has given to us.<sup>226</sup>

Deeb (2006:169) argues that volunteerism and social work constitute "a critical thread in the social weft of the pious modern" in Shi'i Lebanon. Charitable acts thus become a "*necessary* part of piety" and material progress in everyday life does not suffice as a marker for progress and happiness (ibid.). Listening to

<sup>225</sup> Interview with Yehudit Katsover, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 31 August 2014.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

interlocutors carefully construct, ritualise, and deliver "mythico-histories" as processes of "world making" that order and re-order social and political categories (Malkki, 1995:55-56). Their subjectivities are produced from discourses that are symbolic as well as material (Butler, 1997, 2006a; Foucault 1990, 1991). Right-wing women are embodied subjects, their bodies are integral to their political subjectivities; their bodies are also constituted politically – "they are effects of political discourses of violence and vulnerability, security and power, while also being constitutive of politics themselves" (Wilcox, 2015a, 2015b:1). The leaders of the organizations (like Sadhvi Rithambara and Nadia Matar) exert forms of sovereign and disciplinary power to shape the subjectivities of women in and outside their communities; my interlocutors use practices of pedagogy, charity, intimacy, and violence as forms of "biopower" that regulated vital aspects of human life, deciding who is made to live and who *deserves* life) and who is left to die (Foucault, 1991, 2003:239-263). The *everyday*, the *daily*, the *quotidian*, is crucial to their mobilisation and violence and is rendered as the site where the private/domestic merges with the public and enables right-wing women's politics (Das, 2006, 2008; Nordstrom, 1997, 2002; Scheper-Hughes, 1993, 2003; Enloe, 1983, 1989; Parashar, 2013, 2014; Sylvester, 2012; Gentry & Sjoberg 2015; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2015).

## 7.2 A Right-Wing Sisterhood?

In the introduction to this thesis, I had mentioned that my engagement with right-wing women's politics in two disparate movements was an attempt to *push* the *boundaries* of area studies and bring the *regional* into the *international*. This thesis has, thus, highlighted the points of convergence and divergence between women in the cultural nationalist Hindu right-wing movement in India and women in the national religious Zionist settler project in Israel-

Yehudit's words, I argue, for Zionist settler women volunteerism and charity are not only indispensable parts of piety but are also constructed as fundamental to the political 'struggle' for land in Israel, *Judea*, and *Samaria*. Material gains of right-wing politics remain incomplete if not accompanied by practices (and performances) of charitable goodness inculcated and enforced through social norms and used to evaluate and control subjects (Foucault, 1991). As Rose (1998:5) asserts, "Subjects identify not with their immediate material interest, but with the place from which they can see themselves as potentially making good". This section draws on these arguments to examine quotidian practices of charity among Zionist settler women.

### Daily Duties of Service in Gendered Spaces

On a quotidian level, settler women are not only encouraged but also *expected* to undertake various activities that are for the "benefit of the community".<sup>227</sup> Yehudit's aforementioned words highlight 'Jewishness' and 'human-ness' as reasons for carrying out charitable acts. However, it should also be noted that these practices are gendered in the everyday.<sup>228</sup>

To elaborate, I'd like to discuss the figure of the 'new Jew' or the 'new Hebrew'—the *sabra*—in the early Zionist settlement of Palestine. The *sabra*—referred to by my interlocutors as the 'pioneering Jew'—was constructed in two interesting ways. First, the *sabra* was depicted as one opposite of European Jew in anti-Semitic discourses. The *sabra* was not cowardly, miserly, materialistic, self-interested, old, sickly, disempowered, and helpless but was bold, strong, masculine, young, robust, daring, and resourceful. The *sabra* was one who could endure hardship, work the land, and engage in hard labour

<sup>227</sup> Interview with Yehudit Katsover, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 31 August 2014.

<sup>228</sup> For more on gender and Jewish history see – Kaplan & Moore (2010) *Gender and Jewish History*

Palestine. The convergences include: the role of symbols, performances, and material objects in pedagogical practices; the appropriation of mythology and history to establish alternative feminine discourses of the right; the knowledge and use of technology and social media for dissemination of information and activism; the involvement in acts of charity and goodness and the policing of communities of the self as well as the 'other;' the significance of the *everyday* and the warrior-maternal to political mobilisation and violence; the role of the *private*—food, love, sexuality piety etc.—in the *public* and *political* construction of the self and 'other;' and the necessity of friendship and intimate communities of care to the strength of these projects. The divergences include: ideological differences between cultural/religious nationalism and settler colonialism; the number, scale, and locations of the two projects *within* their geographies; the modes of relating to the Hindu and Jewish Zionist diaspora with regards to daily mobilisation and pedagogy; the *newness* of Hindutva's women *visibility* in sites of violence and *danger*; the relationship of women in both movements to neoliberalism as well as their respective states and militaries; the role of religion and piety in the *everyday*; the spatial architecture of nationalism and settler colonialism; and the rigidity/fluidity of organisational structures, sex-segregation, and hierarchies.<sup>619</sup>

These convergences and divergences highlight an understanding of right-wing intersections through women's politics. However, they also necessitate larger questions – *How are these movements interacting? Is there likelihood for a right-wing sisterhood? What would this sisterhood entail?* To answer these questions, I'd like to go back to my ethnography.

<sup>619</sup> These 'lists' are not exhaustive and only include some of the main points of convergence/divergence between my interlocutors in India and Israel-Palestine.

with strength and courage (Zerubavel, 2002; Jacoby, 2005). Second, the *sabra* was an honest person, directly connected to the land and community, giving charitable, loyal, and in servitude of others who were like him (ibid.). The *sabra* man, symbolised in the 1936 Zionist documentary עבודה, *Avodah* (work), was a young muscular man, working hard and intelligently for his land<sup>229</sup> and community, the sweat and dirt on his face and body symbolising his love for the two (Lerski, 1936). The *sabra* woman was not only fit and hardworking (and ready to be a soldier), but was also an embodiment of the spirit of the *kibbutzim*—the maternal, loving, and giving figure—who was moral and looked after the community she had created (Almog, 2000).

These gendered figures continue to be present in contemporary Zionist settler communities and society (Zerubavel, 2002). In my many trips to the outpost-settlement, the visuals from עבודה, *Avodah*, came alive as I noticed men navigating the stone-filled terrain, pushing wheelbarrows, and building structures. Other than older religious men who were ‘spiritual volunteers’ and armed soldiers who ‘protected’ communities, the quotidian volunteer work for the men involved labour and land.<sup>230</sup> Like the *sabra* woman, the contemporary female settler is constructed to be strong and in servitude of the land but also a ‘nurturing’ figure for whom care was not only a Zionist duty but also an innate ‘womanly’ attribute. As my interlocutor Nava elaborated in an interview,

How can I not care about other human beings? I have five children and I have raised them with all the love in the world. Even when my husband was strict with them, I loved them like a mother does. There is something inside me and inside *all* women that allows them to be good to others. Sometimes, they only realise this once they become mothers.

<sup>229</sup> Imagined as technologically advanced socialist Jewish state.

<sup>230</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 16 August 2014.

In September 2014, while conducting ‘fieldwork’ with the Zionist settler organisation, Women in Green, I realised that although my interlocutors had worked hard and carved a prominent space for themselves in their communities, some of them felt *something* was amiss. Sarai, who lived in the settlement of *Kiryat Arba*, articulated it best,

We have done a lot for *Eretz Yisrael* but it is not enough. There are two things that need to be done. First, we need to keep working, keep fighting, keep mobilizing, keep carrying on with our political aims and plans. And second, we need to change the government of Israel; we need a government on the right, *our* type of right. We need a government that embraces our mission and not one that sends soldiers to stop us. Actually, what we need is what *you* have. A Prime Minister like Modi, who is on the right, who knows how to protect his people from those trying to destroy them. *You are lucky*, you know, India is lucky, the women in your research in the Hindu right-wing are lucky, *you* have what *we* need and we need to learn how you got it.<sup>620</sup>

Notwithstanding that she placed me in the same political category as my interlocutors, Sarai’s words struck a chord. They reminded me of a similar conversation—of longing, of incompleteness, of awe—which I had had with Aarti, a prominent member of the Delhi chapter of the *Durga Vahini*. Professing admiration for Israeli Zionist women, especially those “*who lived in the borderlands and fought everyday for their freedom*,”<sup>621</sup> Aarti asserted,

We finally have Modi as a Prime Minister. Someone strong. Someone who doesn’t bow down to vote banks. He comes from Hindutva and will bring to the table what is needed. You know what we need; we need what Israel does. They built walls and have soldiers and

<sup>620</sup> Conversation with Sarai, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 5 September 2014.

<sup>621</sup> Interview with Aarti, Delhi, India, 20 February 2014.

Do I want anyone else to suffer? *How can I?* I know the pain you feel when someone suffers, only a woman can understand that pain. So obviously, I will do everything I can in service of others. You can call it volunteer work or charity or community service, like they call it in America; I just call it being a woman.<sup>231</sup>

The gendered construction of service and social work as an innately ‘womanly’ quality allows settler women to construct practices of charity as a social norm—one that is not only a matter of pride and prestige but also a measure of *how Zionist* and *how womanly* (and motherly) one is (Stasiulis & Yuval-Davis, 1995; Foucault, 1991). Social norms that are then enforced to do two things—exclude (and punish) those who refuse to become serving and moral subjects; and institutionalise women’s charitable initiatives (ibid.).

I’d like to elaborate more on this second point of the institutionalisation of settler women’s charity. To do so, let me first describe the kinds of activities women engage in on a daily basis. As detailed in the *Chapter Three*, one set of women’s community service centres around pedagogy—running and executing educational programmes for multiple audiences; organising and facilitating formal and informal learning spaces; acting as teachers, translators, managers, marketers, social-media experts, designers, writers, logistical coordinators, photographers and videographers, religious guides, providers of food and beverages etc. A second set of charitable practices involves ‘taking care’ of the vulnerable—running daily soup kitchens; buying groceries and delivering meals for the sick, incapacitated, and for those whose family members are away (and/or in the Army); charity drives to collect items such as clothes, household appliances, and furniture and distributing these to those ‘in need;’ volunteering at/in homes for the elderly and disabled and

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<sup>231</sup> Interview with Nava, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 1 September 2014.

checkpoints and ID cards and they don’t allow Arabs to come into their areas; we need that. I follow lots of Zionist women on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube and I have heard one speak at a conference. The way they have worked to keep their country and communities safe is how I want to work. This is how I want to act. This is how I want to mobilize. This is the politics I want.<sup>622</sup>

Aarti’s comment does not capture the nuances of the relationships between the Israeli state, national-religious settler women, and the spatial architecture of Zionism. Sarai’s comment does not capture the nuances of democratic politics in India and the relationships between the parliamentary right-wing and the Hindu right-wing women who act at the local and quotidian level. However, both these exchanges point to right-wing women’s *transnational interactions* and the preliminary *sketches* of a right-wing *sisterhood*.

In what is perhaps the most comprehensive anthology on right-wing women, Bacchetta and Power (2002:15) argue that feminist scholarship needed,

A better understanding of transnational connections between and among the rights, their exchanges of ideas and resources across borders and sales, the conditions that support or block their collective alignments, and how they support and influence each other.

My exchanges with Sarai, Aarti, and other interlocutors have allowed me to witness and interrogate these *transnational connections* “between and among the rights” (ibid.). I, therefore, put forth three points on the interactive relationship/*sisterhood* between Hindu right-wing women and Zionist settler women.

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<sup>622</sup> Ibid.

accompanying them to their (medical) appointments; and fostering children in need. A third set of practices centre on medical and health issues—providing medicine and medical aid to those in need; and discussing and providing reproductive health care to women (with seminars on menopause, pregnancy, infertility, labour) and sexual health advice to the youth. A final set of practices involve activities linked to community-fostering, leisure, and intimacy—collecting funds for local synagogues; running events in religious spaces; building community spaces (like playgrounds, cafes etc.) and maintaining/beautifying them; organising ‘playtime’ and games for children; running a roster of babysitting and carpools; conducting leisure activities for adults in the community; and the ‘re-claiming’ and beautification of land, trees, and gardening to build clean, green, and healthy spaces for those living in the settlements.<sup>232 233</sup>

The abovementioned practices are institutionalised and normativised in three ways. First, they are organised as strategic and deliberate practices that build on the innate but are scheduled, regimented, and run on clear protocols. Second, as Zionist settler women fill in for the (semi-absent) state and the gaps in its welfare, they “govern” each other and the settler communities; exercising (bio)power, control, and discipline and shaping subjectivities (Foucault, 2003, 2011). They also constitute themselves as moral and good individual subjects through practices (or technologies/techniques) of the self that are capable of governance without the state (Foucault, 1988). Linked to this, third, settler women make themselves *visible* through practices of charity. To elaborate, Deeb (2006) points out that *visiting* by women as a method of community work offers novel ways of making the presence of women

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<sup>232</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 17 September 2014.

<sup>233</sup> This last set of practices will also be discussed in the next chapter (*Chapter Five*) on leisure and friendship among right-wing women.

The first point highlights the sentiments that ground the interactions between Hindu right-wing women in India and Zionist settler women in Israel-Palestine. Women in the two projects saw each other as *sisters*, comrades, and political allies; they offered inspiration and support to another. They were united through ideologies that linked *their* land and *their* religion, through histories of British colonialism and *problematic* borders, through the modalities and quotidian nature of their political organising and mobilisation, through the *struggle* of living with the growing *threat* of the Muslim ‘other’, and through their success in carving spaces for women’s work and recognition in their male-dominated projects. My Indian interlocutors professed deep admiration and praise for their Israeli *sisters* and vice versa, each offering advice, encouragement and support to the other. Their interactions focussed on the confluences and the positives, affirming a *need* to stand *united* as right-wing women.<sup>623</sup>

The second point illustrates the modalities of the interactions between Hindu right-wing women in India and Zionist settler women in Israel-Palestine. Here, I argue that an exchange of ideas, resources, and support between right-wing women in these two locations was enabled through both online/virtual and offline/physical modes of communication. To elaborate on the *online/virtual*—right-wing women in India and Israel-Palestine communicated regularly through the Internet, blogs, social media, as well as through mobile apps like WhatsApp and Viber.<sup>624</sup> They *followed* each other on Twitter, replying to tweets and engaging in extended conversations, *re-tweeting* each other, assisting each other with *trolling* ‘enemy’ accounts, and starting joint

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<sup>623</sup> Fieldnotes, London, UK, 10 December 2014.

<sup>624</sup> Fieldnotes, London, UK, 10 December 2014.

felt/noticed in communities. When my interlocutors *visit* various parts of settlements in the Southern West Bank (and cities in Israel) they are not only keeping tabs on ‘populations’, not(ic)ing their grievances and needs, and bringing goods, services, and intimacies to them; but are also *making* Zionism and Zionist women *visible* and present. They are espousing a public image and an embodied assertiveness that allows them to point their governance to their communities and spell to the Arab ‘other’ – *We are here and we will continue to make our communities wholesome. We may be disjointed in spatial configurations and we may have to share our roads with you (and face ‘terror’ from you) but we will continue our work, publicly and openly.*<sup>234</sup>

Going back to the gendering of charitable work, the public presence and *visibility* of women’s goodness also allows them to make a gendered point to male settlers, a point that my interlocutor Shira articulated best,

We [women] are running the show. We do everything that keeps this community together. We give, we serve, we volunteer—that is what Zionism is, that is what it means to be a pioneer... that is what it means to fight for the land. Women’s names and histories and their actions must not be forgotten.<sup>235</sup>

Before I conclude this subsection on women’s quotidian practices of charity, I would also like to mention that although spaces of service are gendered (and age and sex segregated), there exist transgressions across these norms. Men in the settler communities sometimes take on ‘nurturing’ practices linked to spirituality and children. They also involve themselves in women’s initiatives (often in less than desirable ways, to discipline discussions around

<sup>234</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Israel-Palestine, 17 September 2014.

<sup>235</sup> Conversation with Shira, Givat Oz V’Gaon and Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 1 September 2014.

accounts in support of one another.<sup>625</sup> They were *friends* on Facebook and *liked* each other’s pages, sharing and commenting on posts as well as joining and starting common groups.<sup>626</sup> They joined each other’s email lists, comment on blogs, and formed groups on mobile applications, communicating regularly and even creating visual symbols of their unity (See Figure 7.1).<sup>627</sup>



**Figure 7.1: A visual of Hindutva-Zionist solidarity: The saffron *Om* interlinked with the Star of David<sup>628</sup>**

To elaborate on the *offline/physical* interactions: A handful of Hindu right-wing women leaders have been invited by Zionist settler women to give lectures

<sup>625</sup> To protect the anonymity of my interlocutors, I am unable to provide links to the Twitter *Handles* of these exchanges. However, see twitter accounts such as—India <3 Israel - [https://twitter.com/india\\_israel](https://twitter.com/india_israel), India for Israel - <https://twitter.com/Indo4Israeli> and Israel4India - <https://twitter.com/Israel4India>. My interlocutors run similar accounts and also use their personal accounts to reach out to each other.

<sup>626</sup> To protect the anonymity of my interlocutors, I am unable to provide links to the Facebook accounts and pages of these exchanges. However, see public pages such as - [India-Israel alliance](#), [India-Israel Friendship](#), and Hindutva Zionism Women (now deleted). During Israel’s assault on Gaza in the summer of 2014, Hindu right-wing women in Kolkata, India started a Facebook group to profess support for Zionist women and called Hindu men and women to join a march through the city in support of Israel. See more here - <https://unitedwithisrael.org/20000-march-in-india-in-support-for-israel/>

<sup>627</sup> Fieldnotes, London, UK, 10 December 2014.

<sup>628</sup> Source: This image was procured on August 18, 2014 from a message professing support for Israel during the assault on Gaza (2014) from the mailing list of the *Durga Vahini*, Delhi chapter. I have since seen it on numerous online spaces.



reproductive health, spirituality etc.) and when ‘retired’ become full-time volunteers as well.<sup>236</sup> Women, although maintaining their subjectivities as maternal/nurturing also see themselves as militarised and strong ‘frontier women’ and shadows of the *sabra* woman.<sup>237</sup> Thus, they (especially younger women) too involve themselves in the ‘harder’ and more physically demanding efforts on a regular basis.<sup>238</sup>

### Quotidian Community Service as Everyday Violence

While practices of charity shape Zionist settler women as moral subjects, they also simultaneously constitute their subjectivities as violent women. On an elemental level, the very presence of the settler community—its spatial dynamics, architecture, existence, and activity—is political violence (Weizman, 2012). All charitable initiatives, while aiming to serve settler communities, simultaneously and mainly, further Zionist causes and constitute the ‘other’ as an evil entity. The effort to “govern” settler communities and fashion themselves as ‘good’ subjects, thus, go hand in hand with injury to the other through layers of violence. In this subsection, I’d like to examine this idea with a particular emphasis on the charitable work of settler women from Women in Green in ‘reclaiming’ land and planting trees in Netzer in the Southern West Bank. I argue that the quotidian work of planting trees in ‘reclaimed’ land is one of the most violent charitable practices that my interlocutors embrace. I should also mention here that the ‘tree’ takes the position of the *orphan* here—the salient being that is always in danger of being uprooted/burnt for no fault of its own and thereby, must be protected and strengthened at all times (Deeb, 2006:198).

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<sup>236</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 15 and 17 September 2014.

<sup>237</sup> I will discuss the role of these militarized identities in *Chapter Six* when I examine everyday violence.

<sup>238</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 15 and 17 September 2014.

and “share expertise”.<sup>629</sup> A few Zionist women (from Israel and the diaspora) have attended annual Hindu right-wing women’s conferences in India and in the ‘West’, narrating their stories and offering solidarity and advice.<sup>630</sup> While these interactions are nascent, the increasing mobility of middle and upper class women will only further them. The modes of these interactions ensure that, much like feminist activists, right-wing women in India and Israel-Palestine kept abreast of each other’s political developments, had numerous platforms to share ideas and resources, and offered continuous solidarity and support to each other.

The third and final point refers to Bacchetta and Power’s (2002:15) call to analyse the “conditions that support or block their collective alignments”. While the availability and increasing sophistication of technology, *online* resources, and modes of communication as well as the blurring of *boundaries* between the *online* and the *offline* has definitely supported and facilitated these interactions, contemporary political developments like the ‘rise of ISIS and terrorist attacks’, the ‘global growth of the right-wing’, and Narendra Modi’s rise to power have also strengthened the *sisterhood* between the two sets of my interlocutors. However, I end this section with a speculation. Like the idea of left-wing *global sisterhood*, right-wing women’s transnational connections and growing *sisterhood*, when intensified, will face racial and imperialist divisions between Ashkenazi and ‘white-Western’ Zionist settler women in the ‘first world’ and Hindu women in the ‘third world’ as well as numerous divisions along lines of class, caste, and location. These divisions could be potential points of intervention by activists and feminists who are trying to counter the rise of the right in their locations (Dhaliwal & Yuval-Davis, 2014).

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<sup>629</sup> Conversation with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 8 August 2014.

<sup>630</sup> Fieldnotes, New Delhi, India, 23 November 2014.

In 2010, Women in Green began a widespread campaign called **Volunteer to Plant Trees and Save Netzer**.<sup>239</sup> The focus of the campaign—Netzer Hill—is an area of agricultural land between Alon Shuvut and Elazar in the Gush Etsyon settlement block in the Southern West Bank. Located between Jerusalem and Hebron, right off Route 60, the area has been designated as Area C,<sup>240</sup> and several Palestinian organizations have fought for the rights of Palestinian farmers to cultivate this land. In 2010, as part of their larger charity and service initiative of gardening and ‘beautifying’ Israeli Jewish land to ‘reclaim’ sovereignty over it and providing a ‘green’ and ‘clean’ space to the settlers, Women in Green narrowed their focus onto this site. In an effort to explain the roots of this campaign to me, Nadia (the founding leader of Women in Green), insisted I read an old article about her efforts in Netzer published in an online Zionist ‘magazine’ called *Voices*<sup>241</sup> and available on the Women in Green website. The ‘magazine’ quotes her as saying,

Nadia warned, ‘The Arabs are making a concerted effort to expand on to our land reserves. They are doing their best to choke us. If we don't save these lands, the Arabs will work the land up to our window sills if we let them’.<sup>242</sup>

When I asked Nadia about her words, she elaborated,

The problem is much deeper than a basic and simple land dispute. There is a law that we take any land that they don't cultivate for three years; we call it survey land. But it goes deeper than that. We must work and deal with the problems on three levels: on the legal level we

<sup>239</sup> To see the visual documentation of this campaign, see the Facebook Albums uploaded by WIG - <http://bit.ly/2aNLerB>, <http://bit.ly/2aUa9eB>, and <http://bit.ly/2b5OSMU>

<sup>240</sup> For more see – What is Area C? - [http://www.btselem.org/area\\_c/what\\_is\\_area\\_c](http://www.btselem.org/area_c/what_is_area_c)

<sup>241</sup> The ‘magazine’ is more of a blog and was last updated in November 2014. It can be found here – <http://voices-magazine.blogspot.co.uk/>

<sup>242</sup> Nadia Matar and Yehudit Katsover, June 24, 2010, “SHARON KATZ ABOUT ‘ESTABLISHING FACTS ON THE GROUND’” on the WIG website - <http://womeningreen.org/319/> Accessed 1 September 2014.

### 7.3 Re-thinking Space through Right-Wing Women's Politics



Figure 7.2: Run for Unity, Mumbai, India <sup>631</sup>



Figure 7.3: The Outpost Settlement of Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine <sup>632</sup>

<sup>631</sup> The image was taken by the author on December 15, 2013 in Mumbai, India.

<sup>632</sup> The image was taken by the author on September 18, 2014 in West Bank, Palestine

have to raise the issue of the lands and stop *them* from taking *our* land. Why give them three years? On the political level we must keep working to fight for the fact that *Judea* and *Samaria* are an integral part of the Israeli nation and state. If we do that, we can get all this land. And then on what is the personal level, we must spend our time and energy at particular spots—like we did at Netzer, planting and growing things, green things, trees,—to mark parts of the land as ours. The third one is where our women volunteers come in. They have to devote daily time to this cause. It is part of their service work. Also you should know we check the maps before we begin; we only take what is ours, not private Arab land—we want to take it but we don’t.<sup>243</sup>

Throughout 2010, members of Women in Green volunteered to serve this land through a coordinated programme of planting olive trees. They organized daily visits (planting time and leisure walks) to this site. They organized a camp for teenagers (*Camp Yibaneh* - יִיבְנָה)<sup>244</sup> —a volunteer led effort—where children stayed in tents on the land and cultivated it in the day under the supervision of the women. Often their efforts necessitated a change in approach and in those cases they sat down and strategized on how to do their work best. As a volunteer Elena elaborated,

We planted smaller trees and bushes first—delicate ones, like we do in our daily work in our communities. But those Arabs they would come and uproot everything when we left. So we ordered large trees from Galilee. A dozen large olive trees came in a truck and I coordinated

I have begun this section of my conclusion with two images.

The first (Figure 7.2) is an image of a Hindu right-wing woman walking the “Run for Unity” in Mumbai, India.<sup>633</sup> Modi and his party, the BJP, organized the “Run” in dozens of cities in late 2013 and early 2014. A charitable event, the run was to serve many functions. It was to raise funds for a statue of Hindu icon Sardar Patel in Gujarat. It was to unify different factions of the Hindu right, bringing together men, women, and children in various organizations. It was to embrace neoliberal notions of health and fitness and blend them with *traditional* Hindu knowledge on the well-being of the body and mind. And finally, it was to *mark, claim, and saffronise* cities like Mumbai. My interlocutors, excited and energized, assembled at a public park in Central Mumbai at sunrise. They changed into t-shirts with Hindu right-wing logos; they handed out pamphlets of the *Samiti* and *Durga Vahini*; they took photographs; they stretched and warmed up to loud devotional music. Donned in saffron scarves, shawls, and sashes, they walked, ran, and paused through landmarks of Central-South Mumbai, all the while making themselves and their causes *visible* and marking urban and public space into *their* space.

The second image (Figure 7.3) was taken towards the end of my fieldwork with Women in Green in Israel-Palestine. Much of the outpost-settlement had been *cleaned up*; rocks and stones were thrown away and weeds were replaced with blooming plants. However, the anxieties over winter were setting in. *How would my interlocutors inhabit this space with their temporary tents and camps when the temperatures fell?* Plans were drawn to build winter tents with heating; my interlocutors were mobilized, recruiting visitors, pedagogical participants, and the youth of nearby settlements to build these shelters.

<sup>243</sup> Interview with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 2 September 2014.

<sup>244</sup>The word Yibaneh (יִיבְנָה) translates to “it will be built”. To find out more about the camp, see the following video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vq791qo5YK0>

<sup>633</sup> Read more about this series of events at the Indian Express – <http://indianexpress.com/tag/run-for-unity/>



their arrival and we planted them. But you know what, they destroyed them also. Those evil people, they destroy all our work.<sup>245</sup>

In 2011, the calls to collate charitable and service efforts around planting trees in Netzer further intensified. As Elena pointed out, “*every time we plant they uproot, so we will keep planting, if they uproot one tree; we will plant two*”.<sup>246</sup> In a post on the WIG website and Facebook page, Nadia and Yehudit wrote in bold bright font,

We wish to encourage anyone interested in volunteering to plant trees in the Land of Israel in memory of loved ones, in honour of a new birth, as a bar or bat mitzvah present, or to mark any other occasion, to plant in Netzer. Our daily volunteers will post your dedication on your tree and then tenderly care for it; it will await your visit while both- us and the tree guards the land of Judea for the Jewish People for posterity. Every Jewish tree adds to the beauty of our country and redeems the Jewish heartland for the Jewish People. Please become a personal actor in our national redemption! ... Our spades are ready and awaiting your response!<sup>247</sup>

As the planting became a daily exercise of charity and *visibility*, the women also started addressing other related causes in that area such as the roads, irrigation systems, fences, sheds for hitchhikers, ‘lookouts’ etc.<sup>248</sup> Most interestingly, in 2011-12, while the Jewish holiday of Tu Be’Shvat—a New Year for the Trees that is celebrated in contemporary Israel as a day to plant trees and preserve the ecology—fell on 6 February 2012, my interlocutors

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<sup>245</sup> Conversation with Elena, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 2 September 2014.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> November 4, 2011, *Standing Firm in Netzer*, WIG Website -

<http://womeningreen.org/standing-firm-in-netzer/> Accessed 1 September 2014

<sup>248</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 3 September 2014.

When I composed this photograph the early construction of the first of these tents was underway. A group of young girls and boys from the nearby settlement of Efrata had been working *on it* all day. As they finished for the day; they showered and changed; they rested near *their work*; chatting and smoking as the spatial permanence of women’s settler colonial politics caught the shadows of tall Palestinian trees.

Throughout this thesis, I have mentioned the terms *space(s)*, *site(s)*, and *location(s)*, repeatedly. These terms have been intertwined with the words *politics* and *practices*. As shown through the four themes of pedagogy, charity, intimacy, and violence, right-wing women’s everyday politics were in a constant dialogue with space—shaping it and being shaped by it. These two images re-emphasize as well as summarize this dialogue. The spatial is integral to right-wing women’s everyday politics; my interlocutors’ politics are integral to the spatial aims of cultural nationalism and settler colonialism. These images, alongside the narratives in this thesis, allow me to nuance this summary and put forth six points about right-wing women’s spatial politics.

First, as demonstrated through several ethnographic narratives in *Chapters Three, Four, Five, and Six*, the spatial and the social are interlinked and even inseparable, each organizing and constructing the other (Massey, 1994:254-256). For instance, the spatial set-up of pedagogical spaces (from the location to the material objects at the site to the ambience) organized social interactions and vice versa. The young girls in the Hindu right-wing training camp were policed/disciplined through the use of the school grounds, PA systems, open dormitories etc. They, in turn, shaped these premises, creating corners of leisure, fun, and mischief alongside and *inside* classrooms.<sup>634</sup> The spatial

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<sup>634</sup> See Chapter *Three*, p.73

decided to enact a “*Hanukkah tale of olive trees planted*” and “*turn the night of Hanukkah into Tu Be’Shvat*” in late December 2011.<sup>249</sup> As Nadia and Yehudit elaborated in an article on Arutz Sheva (Israel National News),

There's nothing like a winter's night—bitter cold, with pouring rain and slashing winds that no umbrella can resist, thick fog, and deep mud—to turn Hanukkah night into Tu Be’Shvat in Netzer. In weather like this, there's no danger that those seeking to prevent Jews from planting will be out and about. So we exploited these optimal conditions and set to work, bringing in the tractors and ten mature olive trees for planting.<sup>250</sup>

Appropriating the symbol of the tree, likening it to the soldier and the Jew and focusing on the resilience of their own bodies, they added,

The work is hard. First our shoes disappear in a thick mud that feels like cement. Soon after, we lose the feeling in our feet that are numb with cold. Gradually, the heavy rain soaks our overcoats, our fleece jackets underneath, then our sweaters, shirts and undergarments. Add to this the strong wind chill factor, and there's no defence against defeat except to allow physical misery to be banished by the joy of seeing the old trees replanted together with the new ones. And how beautiful they are: glorious in their fullness and maturity, standing upright like proud Jews in Mattityahu's army, fighting for a proud and independent Land of Israel.....Our trees are indeed soldiers because the tree that grabs the land with its roots is what decides if this land is ours. This tree is our literal soldier in the field, striking a stake in the earth and holding our ground for us. To our shame, trees planted by Arabs are protected whereas trees planted by Jews are like the Jews

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<sup>249</sup> Matar, Nadia. January 5, 2012, *Women in Green- Tu Bishvat Joy on Hanukah*, Arutz Sheva, <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/11081> Accessed 3 September 2014

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

architecture of the settlements nurtured social intimacies, allowing for the strengthening of bonds as well as the surveillance and policing of communities (of the self and the ‘other’) (Weizman, 2012). Practices of friendship, leisure, and charity, in turn, facilitated the preservation and furthering of intimate spaces like cafés, gardens, picnic spots, and swings.<sup>635</sup>

Second, Marxist spatial theorist, Lefebvre (1991) has argued for a triad of space that combines its physical, intellectual, and social aspects. Through this triad, he sketches the societal production of space as a dialectical interaction between the following three aspects—spatial practice, referring to a “perceived” physical space that is socially (re)produced in everyday life and can be empirically mapped and measured; representations of space, referring to a “conceived” and conceptualized space that is developed cognitively and contains the representations of power and ideology; and representational spaces, referring to ‘ideational’ spaces “lived” through imagery and symbols (Lefebvre, 1991:38-39). This thesis weaves through these three aspects of space, showing how each is crucial to the politics of right-wing women. My interlocutors *controlled* certain spaces (like pedagogical sessions, the outpost-settlement of Givat Oz V’Gaon, the weekly *shakhas* (branches) etc.) *conceiving* and structuring them to their social practices/needs/demands. They also subverted male-dominated and male-formulated spaces (like discursive spaces, spaces of charity linked to taboo topics, spaces of violence) by approaching them through their *lived* ideational and iconographic constructs and symbolic and material power. Both—the conceived representations of space and lived representational spaces—enabled and were enabled through spatial practices involving the *physical* space of the Hindu nation and *Eretz Yisrael*.

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<sup>635</sup> See Chapter *Four*, p.158 and Chapter *Five*, p.234

themselves frequent terror victims. .... And our trees, despite the persecutions, fight valiantly to strike roots in the land of our fathers. They suffer repeated and brutal, uprooting, seizures, and impounding. The road is long, hard, and painful, like the way of all things true that try to assert themselves against vested falsehoods.<sup>251</sup>

These cycles of planting, uprooting, mourning, and embodied goodness and bravery continued through 2012, with more and more women settlers making the site a regular stop on their charity work.<sup>252</sup> In 2013, the women handed over the plot to soldiers and ‘transferred’ their duties, focussing on other lands. In my conversation with them, Yehudit and Nadia elaborated on this event and said,

Israel is an olive tree, you see. Like the olive tree only releases its oil by pressing, so too Israel only returns to the proper path by way of suffering and persecution. May it be God’s will that we can now stop suffering and what has been rooted will stay like that; the soldiers will take care of it.<sup>253</sup>

I have presented this lengthy narrative of Nadia and the Women in Green’s efforts in Netzer to make four arguments that demonstrate the links between the quotidian charitable practice of planting trees/gardening and violence.

First, trees, planting, and the ‘green’ have been important cultural symbols for Israel (and Palestine), figuring prominently in the shaping of collective memory and identity (Bardenstein, 1999). In the Israeli context, trees take up many forms—they signify recollections of a land lost, they are planted to

Third, pushing Lefebvre’s conceptualization of space further, postcolonial scholarship by Homi Bhabha (2004:55) and critical geography scholarship by Edward Soja (1996:100-110) argue for a “Third Space,” a transcending composite/hybrid of all spaces that overlays physical space, makes symbolic use of its objects, and embodies the real and imagined life-world of experience, events, emotions, and politics. This “Third Space”, Soja (1996:70) argues, “never stands alone, totally separate from its precedents, or given absolute precedence on its own” and becomes a space of possibilities that allows for the transformation of spatial practices. While the concept of the *Third Space* has been used to theorize dissentious decolonial, anti-colonial, and postcolonial subjectivities; I argue that this thesis has shown that right-wing women too occupy this space to not only perpetuate violence against the ‘other’ but to also push their own agendas, discourses, and *everyday* politics within larger patriarchal and authoritarian structures of the right. The *Third Space* is thus the space of bargaining and negotiation; the site of submission to and subversion of patriarchal structures; the location of collusion with and resistance to men in the right-wing; and the ground where the pluralities, contradictions, and hybrid affinities of right-wing women materialize.

Fourth, this thesis has engaged with feminist debates around space. It has highlighted that socio-spatial structures are gendered (Massey, 1994; Rose, 1993, 1994, 1995; Bondi, 1990, 1993). Norms and practices of gender construct space, and space, in turn, facilitates the gendering of *everyday* life. Alongside gender, *intersectional* categories of class, caste, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion etc. also code social spaces (ibid.). For instance, the spatial settings of upper class and elite Zionist settler women were markedly different from quotidian pedagogical sites, enabling (and being enabled by) a unique set of

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 3 September 2014.

<sup>253</sup> Interview with Nadia Matar and Yehudit Katsover, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 2 September 2014.



mark return, they are the sites of pilgrimages, their shade is a place of burial,<sup>254</sup> they are the theme of nationalist poetry, and they are even the subject of an annual Jewish holiday—ט"ו בשבט, Tu Be'Shvat<sup>255</sup> (ibid.:159-160). As the narrative of Netzer suggests, as and when required, Zionist settler women appropriate this symbol and discursively turn it into the settler, the Jew, the Jewish terror victim, the Israeli citizen, the mighty soldier, and the nation itself. *All* these symbolic appropriations when interspersed with constructed tales of Arabs 'stealing' Jewish land and uprooting 'Jewish' trees establish the Arab as the injurious 'other' who has the will and ability to cause grievous harm to the 'self' and who must be stopped through any means required. Planting trees as a charitable act, thus, does both—intensifies the daily language of settler women's violence and ensures that my interlocutors "cause grievous harm to any Arab that comes near the trees or them".<sup>256</sup>

Second, in addition to the symbolism, trees and planting have also been significant to Israeli settler colonial policies in various ways. During the years of early Zionist settlement, there was an immense focus on 'greening' the desert and planting trees. After state formation and before 1979, the Israeli state actually focussed on improving Palestinian agriculture as means to pacify the colonised and render them more dependent on Israel (Gordon, 2008). However, by 1979 the state strengthened a policy of grabbing what they termed (and enabled) uncultivated Palestinian land and stopped agricultural subsidies and limited the water supply to the occupied territories (Weizman, 2012:116-122). The grabbed lands were then termed 'survey lands' and

<sup>254</sup> An example of this would be the narrative of Sarah Nachson in the introduction to *Chapter Three*—Sarah wanted to bury her child near an olive tree in the Hebron Jewish cemetery.

<sup>255</sup> Tu Be'Shvat, the 15th day of the Jewish month of Shevat, is a holiday also known as the New Year for Trees. Eating fruit such as grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates marks the day. In contemporary Israel, it is celebrated as a day for ecological awareness and planting trees.

<sup>256</sup> Interview with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 2 September 2014.

social interactions.<sup>636</sup> A similar example would be the difference in the spatial settings of the flamboyant Hindu Women's Conference and the training camps for young girls from small towns and suburbs around Mumbai.<sup>637</sup> I have also displaced dichotomous conceptualizations of space, questioning the binaries of space—public/private, personal/political, symbolic/material, centre/periphery, and real/imagined—through feminist lenses. My interlocutors' narratives blur the boundaries between these binaries and celebrate the instability of these categories as well as the possibilities of reversing and recoding them (Jay, 1981; Bondi, 1990).

Fifth, this thesis has highlighted the significance of spatialities of the body, the street, the city, and the nation to right-wing women's *everyday* politics. In her work on Hindu right-wing women of the *Samiti*, Bacchetta (2002:43-56) builds on feminist scholarship on space and argues that spatialities are pivotal actors. They are "not passive, abstract, inert matter" or a backdrop onto which right-wing women's politics and agency inscribe themselves (Bacchetta, 2002:45). Spatialities play active roles as "producers, signifiers" and mediators of power (ibid.). I conceptualize spatiality to be a substantiated and recognized social product, i.e. a socially produced space that holds social relations and subjectivities (Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996). I argue that my narratives have illustrated that the body (of the right-wing woman) takes on several forms (from maternal to militarized ones); the street (as navigated by right-wing women) takes on transformations by the political mobilization of the body; the city (as inhabited by right-wing women) is mediated by the socio-spatial practices of the body and its mobilization in the streets; and the nation (as imagined by right-wing women) is rendered a gendered geopolitical entity that contains several inter-related spatialities (like the body,

<sup>636</sup> See *Chapter Three*, p. 73

<sup>637</sup> See *Chapter Three*, p. 73

‘planted’ by the state, establishing a direct connection between land use, land ownership, and planting (ibid.). Settler women have extended this settler colonial violence of land grab and planting not only by *living in settlements* but also as they occupy ‘survey land’ on hilltops such as Netzer.<sup>257</sup> Their daily acts of charity and *visibility* allow the Israeli state to grab more Palestinian land and enforce more control over the occupied territories. Passing on this land to the IDF after ‘stabilising’ it only furthers prolonged state control. Furthermore, as Weizman (2012:111-137) elaborates, settlements are constructed as green garden-filled urban spaces—the technological city in the pastoral countryside—and the planting of trees within them *and* in their surrounding lands is seen as means to increase the ‘superiority’, ‘purity’, ‘cleanliness’, and ‘Jewishness’ of the territory standing in opposition to the impure, dirty, unkempt, and arid Arab land. As settler women embrace these constructions through their daily service, they further the very basic logic and violence of superiority of Zionism and settler colonialism.

Third, the *visibility* of planting—either through physical presence at a particular site or through social media documentation—as well as the symbolism of the brave and strong planter woman allows my interlocutors to enforce norms of ‘goodness’ and ‘courage’ and police settler communities. This “governance” facilitates volunteers, daily participation, and embracing of the physical demands of the project, furthering its significance and violent results (Foucault, 1991, 2003).

Fourth, as settler women’s acts of planting trees enable violence in the everyday, they also allow them to push the potential of their charitable practices. To elaborate, the work in spaces like Netzer allows my interlocutors

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<sup>257</sup> As well as *Givat Oz V’Gaon* – one of the main sites of this ethnography.

the street, and the city). My interlocutors dispel the boundaries of these spatialities as they shape them and are shaped by them, problematizing binaries and dichotomies in the study of both, space and feminist politics.

Sixth and final, this thesis has sketched the spatial relationships between right-wing women and the state. For example, it has argued that right-wing women’s charitable practices and the spaces they shape are substitutive sites for the state’s welfare (Foucault, 1988).<sup>638</sup> Furthermore, this thesis has highlighted that the confluence of my interlocutors’ politics and space is a site that encapsulates the differences in the relationships between Hindu right-wing women and the Indian state and Zionist settler women and the Israeli state.

To elaborate, although Zionist settler women repeatedly expressed discontent with the Israeli state, blaming it for *giving away* Jewish land and for being unsupportive and oppressive to their *struggles*; the Israeli state has been complicit and has explicitly enabled the settlement of *Judea* and *Samaria* and the politics and violence of my interlocutors. The state has constructed settlements, provided financial support to architectural projects, communities, and individual settlers, built walls, checkpoints, and systems of surveillance, instilled soldiers to guard settlements and *shared* roads, imprisoned, displaced, and murdered Palestinians with impunity, nurtured sites of educational tourism and migration, and even professed that “any future dismantlement of Jewish settlements in the West Bank would amount to ‘ethnic cleansing’” (Gordon, 2008; Weizman, 2012; Perugini & Gordon, 2016:1). The Israeli state has provided *top-down* spatial support to enable the *everyday* politics of Zionist settler women. Hindu right-wing women have had

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<sup>638</sup> See *Chapter Four*, p.158

to negotiate boundaries of gender norms within the settler project and within their homes. For instance, as mentioned in the narrative of Netzer, settler women see themselves as very strong and brave women who can withstand/fight the harshest weather conditions and the threat of the enemy to carry out their work, even in the dead of the winter night. As their bodies soaked the cold rain, and their hands dug the land to root olive trees, they saw themselves as planting trees that were like Jewish soldiers. When they were required to strategize—change their approach, appropriate a Jewish holiday, work in the winter—they did. On one hand, they constructed themselves as the nurturing mothers of steadfast soldiers, and on the other, they constructed themselves as embodied subjects beyond traditional gender roles and norms. These dual and fluid constructions enabled them to highlight to the larger project (and especially the men in the communities) that they were robust and masculine as they were feminine. It also highlighted that they, the Women in Green, were engaged in strategic and militarily inclined thought at all time.<sup>258</sup> Using these gender constructions to break boundaries of private/public and gain mobility out of the domestic, my interlocutors pushed their identities as political and *visible* subjects, even in the face of danger and strenuous physical exertion.

### **The 'Newness' of Daily Charity, Service, and Volunteering**

It can definitely be argued that service and charitable acts are not 'new' ideas in the Jewish (or Hindu) communities. In fact, as elaborated in previous sections, right-wing women rely on innateness (through sex/gender and religion) and a history of charitable servitude to construct their ethical subjectivities. This, thus, behoves the question – *How are these 'old' (and innate) ways of giving transformed into 'new' and relevant modes of charity?* This

<sup>258</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 3 September 2014.

a different relationship with the Indian state. Until the Modi government's ascent to centralised power (in May 2014), the Indian state (governed by a coalition of what my interlocutors term anti-national *sickular* (secular) parties) was a mere source of lack and injury for my interlocutors in Delhi.<sup>639</sup> Even as their violence went largely un-policed and condoned by the state, my interlocutors in Delhi expressed disinterest in parliamentary politics and governance. As Sanjanaji said,

We didn't care what happened in the parliament. They are all a bunch of buffoons, throwing chairs and microphones around. We cared about the ground; what we did in our areas and cities.<sup>640</sup>

Hindu right-wing women built *bottom-up* spatial structures enabled through practices of exclusion and *everyday violence*, mobilising around food, education, welfare, housing, love, and daily lives, and *pushing out* the 'other' into the peripheries of the city and the state. For example, they made it extremely difficult for Muslim families to rent/purchase properties in what they termed *Hindu buildings* in Mumbai. Emphasizing their meat (and beef) eating practices, their threat to young Hindu women, and their apparent allegiance to extremism and terrorism, they coaxed and threatened homeowners and builders in various localities to not conduct business with Muslim families. In other words, they built their own spatial forms of *walls* and *checkpoints* through systems of social policing and violence, outside of the state, oppressing, hurting, and killing the 'other'. Having said this, as the

<sup>639</sup> I must make it clear here that this sentiment was not expressed by right-wing women who lived in states/provinces where the BJP or affiliated Hindu right-wing parties were in power. These sentiments were only expressed in relation to central power of the state and not with regards to power at the province/district/municipal level. The state has played a very active role in enabling Hindu right-wing violence at the provincial level; the pogrom in Gujarat (2002), the communal riots in Mumbai (1992-93), and the Kandhamal riots (2008) are some examples of this. For more on the Gujarat pogrom, see Ghassem-Fachandi (2012) and on communal violence and Shiv Sena women in Maharashtra, see Sen (2008).

<sup>640</sup> Interview with Sanjana, New Delhi, India, 17 February 2014.

subsection addresses this question and examines the navigation of the ‘newness’ of charity amongst Zionist settler women.

To begin, I’d like to revert to the example of Netzer and highlight a report published in 2013 in the right-wing paper *Makor Rishon* (First Source). The report launches with dramatic prose that is steeped in mythological pasts; it says,

An ancient road crosses the length of the Land of Israel, running from South to North. It starts at Be’er Sheva in the northern Negev, climbs up to the Hebron Hills and continues north, via Halhul and Bethlehem, to Jerusalem. The road continues to Ramallah, Nablus and Jenin, and reaches its end in the vicinity of Afula. The “Cross Israel Highway” of those days served 2nd Temple era pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem from Be’er Sheva and Hebron, and is also known as “The Patriarchs’ Route”, named after the forefathers of the nation who travelled on it. Silent witnesses stand by the sides of the segment that passes through Gush Etzion, reminders of the bustling life in this area, over 2000 years ago. The Patriarchs’ Route” in Gush Etzion also passes through an area known as Netzer, located between the Elazar and Alon Shvut communities. The Netzer area is built on terraces that assemble a spectacularly beautiful, green mosaic; green grapes twining alongside old olive trees in plots of varying shapes and sizes, and in the pre-Spring season the Netzer space looks like a Claude Monet masterpiece: the green background is spotted with the pink and white of the almond trees at the peak of their bloom. A biblical beauty. But this pastoral bubble bursts the moment we ‘zoom-in’ on the photo, then we discover

Modi government finishes more than two years in power, the spatial configurations of the relationships between Hindu right-wing women and the state are being transformed. My interlocutors are now gaining more legitimacy and massive support from the state and are also contributing to the state’s oppressive apparatus.<sup>641</sup>

#### 7.4 Re-framing Questions of/on Feminist Agency

In the introduction to this thesis, I asserted that right-wing women’s mobilisations have had very uneasy encounters with feminism and feminist politics. Postcolonial feminist scholars have repeatedly called for examining how women in the *non-West* were *doing* gender and *doing* nationalism and politics at the same time (Hellman-Rajanayagm, 1994; Murugkar, 1991). However, these discussions have been guided by dichotomies of good/bad that outline the movements that mean *progress* and *agency* for women and feminism and the projects that were seen as *disempowering* for *all* women (Sarkar & Butalia, 1998). Right-wing women’s politics have been largely classified as sites of *non-empowerment*, *partial-empowerment*, and/or *false-empowerment*, with my interlocutors being labelled as victims/pawns *coerced into* the public and the political by patriarchal nationalisms and settler colonialism (Dworkin, 1982; Koonz, 1986; Blee, 1991; Sarkar & Butalia, 1998; Sarkar, 1998, 1999; Hansen, 1999). These claims have invoked limited and *liberal* ideas of agency—a ‘conscious’ and ‘independent’ ability of a subject to act (McNay, 2000). Agency, here, is equated to autonomy, freedom, and/or resistance that produce subjects that are *either* empowered agents *or*

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<sup>641</sup> An example of this includes recent state-sanctioned acts of cow-vigilantism, which have led to assault, murder, and rape. The government has even sanctioned official ID cards to *gau rakshaks* (cow protectors). For more, see- <http://bit.ly/2cF8siU>, <http://bit.ly/2cjMULL>, and <http://bit.ly/2d0I9cB>

a real battle for this land and the future of the country, with the innocent plants often standing like soldiers on the frontline.<sup>259</sup>

In yet another conversation about charity, I asked Nadia about this article and the peculiar prose. Nadia smiled and elaborated,

Along the path that ran across Israel during the time of the second temple, these were two ritual baths, *mikvahs*, which were used by pilgrims on their way to the Temple. They were also kept filled with water by volunteers and cleaned as well so pilgrims could use them to purify themselves. Pilgrims were also given water and food and shelter as they walked across Israel. That is *our* tradition; we give and we care.<sup>260</sup>

Nadia's words and the journalist's clichéd yet emotive prose allow me to make two arguments here. First, building on the point that opened this subsection, I argue that there is a lengthy 'history' of Jewish charity that is constructed, appropriated, and narrated repeatedly to establish the idea of the 'good' and 'giving' Zionist. Countering narratives of European anti-Semitism as well as claiming higher moral ground vis-à-vis the Arab 'other', these appropriations place contemporary practices of settler women's charity in a long line of innately good people and their humanitarian actions (Hobsbawm, 1983). Second, alongside this 'history', a language and imagery of the changing landscape of Israel—the *innocent plants often standing like soldiers; the biblical landscape turning into an impressionist Monet painting*—allow Zionist settler woman to reconfigure the 'old' ways of giving into more widespread,

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<sup>259</sup>Nordman, Zofnat. February 2, 2013. *Uprooting That Which Was Planted*. Makor Rishon. And WIG website <http://womeningreen.org/uprooting-that-which-was-planted/> Accessed 7 September 2014

<sup>260</sup> Conversation with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 8 September 2014.

oppressed victims (Madhok, Phillips & Wilson, 2013; Sajed, 2016; Sajed & Hobson, *forthcoming*- 2017).

This thesis has demonstrated that the above-mentioned theorizations on agency remain inadequate to examine the "lives of women whose desires are shaped by non-liberal positions" (Mahmood, 2005:203). They also remain insufficient to understand the everyday politics, mobilization, violence, and potential of *difficult* and *deviant* women who are deemed antithetical to the project of feminism. As this ethnography has highlighted, right-wing women consciously construct themselves between multiple domains of nationalism, settler colonialism, political violence, neoliberalism, religion, and feminism (Karam, 2002). They bargain and negotiate with patriarchal power relations, both reproducing them and contesting them, muddling the very categories of agent, victim, and subject. I, therefore, put forth four points that necessitate the re-framing of questions of/on feminist agency.

First, drawing on recent feminist scholarship, I argue that agency is not only gendered but it also intersects with categories of class, caste, race, ethnicity, sexuality etc. (Madhok, Phillips & William, 2013). The debates on right-wing women's agency (or lack thereof) reduce my interlocutors to monolithic entities that are *all* assumed to experience power and *do* politics in identical ways *as women*. This thesis has highlighted that women not only join these projects for different reasons and in several capacities but also that they negotiate different hierarchies of gender, class, caste, location, and race/ethnicity. I, thus, argue for a re-framing of the debate on right-wing women's agency, calling for a more nuanced understanding of my interlocutors' *intersectional* subject positions (McNay, 2013).

relevant, and institutionalized ‘new’ ways of giving. The old way of giving is then constructed as merely spiritual, whereas the ‘new’ way of service maintains the spiritual but also ushers in the material and the militarised and strategic.

As mentioned in the previous subsections, one of the key aspects of the ‘new’ ways of giving is visibility. Deeb (2006), elaborating in a different context albeit one that is relevant here, asserts that volunteerism and charity have been institutionalised in the public sphere in ways that are *new*, that *require* visibility, and that *necessitate* a public display. My interlocutor Nadia’s words echo Deeb’s claims and centre visibility as the core of these ‘new’ ways of giving. She says,

We want to make sure they all know we are here doing this work. The Israeli communities, the Arabs, the Americans, the journalists, the UN people, and all of us in *Judea* and *Samaria*.<sup>261</sup>

Visibility is thus vital to the contemporary politics of giving and charity in the context of Zionist settler women in three ways. First, as elaborated in the previous section, it allows the formation of the performed and publicly ‘good’ and *present* subject who is moral and gives to (and “governs”) the community (Foucault, 2003, 2011). Second, this visibility ensures “disciplining” and “punishment” through norms of charity (Foucault, 1991). Those who do not give their time (and/or contribute materially/monetarily) can be identified and shamed socially and publically. A settler woman who does not serve the community and embody this charitable ‘goodness’ is therefore seen as not only immoral in her ‘womanhood’ and piety, but also as one that is not committed to the land of *Eretz Yisrael*, its expansion, the Jewish communities

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<sup>261</sup> Interview with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 2 September 2014.

Second, in her ethnography of women’s participation in the mosque movement in Cairo, Egypt, Mahmood (2005) challenges liberal sensibilities and the conceptualization of agency as freedom and autonomy. She argues that dominant feminist literature renders agency as a synonym for liberation that is only evident when women resist and subvert patriarchal power and authority. She asks,

If we recognize that the desire for freedom from, or subversion of, norms is not an innate desire that motivates all beings at all times, but is also profoundly mediated by cultural and historical conditions, then the question arises: how do we analyse operations of power that construct different kinds of bodies, knowledge, and subjectivities whose trajectories do not follow the entelechy of liberatory politics? (Mahmood, 2005:14-15)

This thesis speaks to Mahmood’s work; through my ethnography of Hindu right-wing and Zionist settler women, I have highlighted that the meaning and sense of agency cannot be fixed *a priori*. Agency emerges through and is conditioned by everyday relationships of power, sociability, intimacy, violence, and piety and takes on multiple forms beyond autonomy and resistance (Hutchings, 2013; Madhok, 2013). My interlocutors were “wedded to structures of authority” that configured cultural nationalism and settler colonialism but they also challenged them (Phạm, 2013:35). They saw their relationships as connective rather than individual, where “one’s action is rarely one’s own and rarely for one’s own sake only, for it is pulled, pushed, harmonized, agitated, coaxed, pleaded . . . by multiple bonds” (ibid.:37). Their subject positions were constituted *within* regimes of power. They reproduced hierarchies of *us* and *them*, reduced the *other* to a monolith, and submitted to as well as replicated various forms of gendered authoritarianism, policing, and power. However, their *everyday* politics also enabled—and were enabled through—a quotidian fortitude, *mundane* yet consistent work, and bargains



that inhabit it and (by extension) the well-being of herself, her children, and her family and loved ones.<sup>262</sup> As my interlocutor Nili elaborated,

How can you call yourself a woman and not want to give? How can you call yourself a mother and not want to help the community? How can you call yourself a Jew and not think about other Jews? How can you call yourself a Zionist and not be here, on the *frontier*, helping to build a life and a state, taking care of the land and the community?<sup>263</sup>

Third, the visibility also ensures that those women who give in adequate and extraordinary ways are not only seen as pedestals of goodness within the community but are encouraged and praised as well as rewarded with more power, prestige, and responsibility within the community and within Women in Green organisational structure.<sup>264</sup>

In addition to visibility, I argue, the ‘new’ ways of giving and institutionalisation of charity also manifest in two crucial ways. First, they *necessitate* and facilitate the maintenance if not the development of key spatial infrastructures such as spaces of learning and teaching, public parks and green spaces of leisure, farms and wineries, hospitals and medical facilities etc. These spaces not only provide the architecture for service but also, more importantly, sustain and intensify the violence of occupation—fragmenting Palestinian lands and lives and ensuring ‘green’ settler communities on hilltops across the West Bank (Weizman, 2012). Second, they ensure that women become—rather, stay—the face of benevolence and charity in the Zionist settler project. Women thus grapple with the responsibilities and consequences of taking on these roles, which include and are not limited to managing the “double burden” of home and work and functioning (yet again)

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<sup>262</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 6 September 2014.

<sup>263</sup> Conversation with Nili, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 5 September 2014.

<sup>264</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 6 September 2014.

and negotiations that allowed them to navigate and negotiate power structures, defy gendered norms, maximise their day-to-day conditions, and render their life more inhabitable (Kandiyoti, 1988). The narratives in this thesis, thus, muddle dichotomies of private/public, personal/political, passive/active, and victim/agent; they necessitate a re-framing of agency as beyond singular autonomy and freedom.

Third, following on from the second point that calls for dissociation between agency and autonomy, this thesis has highlighted the need to (re)examine the relationships between agency and coercion. Madhok, Phillips, and Wilson (2013:7) argue that an understanding of agency that is exercised within constraints and under coercive conditions remains under-theorised. Right-wing women’s *everyday* politics provide a means to further these limited theorizations. This thesis in particular, with its focus on two movements operating through converging and diverging practices and processes, sheds light on the similarities and differences between coercive structures. Rather than assuming and (re)instating binaries between agency and coercion, I, thus, argue that this thesis has shown the collaborative and intricate relationships between agency and coercion. It is in these intimacies that feminist scholars and activists can converse, reflect, and theorise our positionalities, locations, trajectories, and “the inequalities we are trying to address” (Madhok, Phillips & Wilson, 2013:8).

Fourth and final, this thesis emphasizes Veena Das’ (2006:7) cautionary words – “our theoretical impulse is often to think of agency in terms of escaping the ordinary rather than as a descent into it”. Studies on agency have been accompanied by Eurocentric and orientalist dispositions of the surprise of “discovering agency in unlikely locations” (Madhok, Phillips & Wilson, 2013:3). This ‘surprise’ not only highlights continued expectations of

as symbolic markers of public morality (Al-Ali, 2007; Yuval-Davis, 1997). However, women also instrumentalize their importance to the *visibility* and violence of these ‘new’ ways of giving in significant strategic ways and “bargain” and negotiate with the men within their homes and within in the movement<sup>265</sup> (Kandiyoti, 1988). My interlocutor Sarai’s elaboration best summarizes this idea,

My husband hates it when I spend so much time outside doing things for Women in Green. He is old and he is sick; he just wants his meals and wants me to spend time with him at home as he can’t leave the house much. But he also knows how important my work and women’s work is to our cause. We live in *Kiryat Arba* in relative safety because there are women like me who are showing to the world how good we are and helping our community stay alive and okay. And you know, most importantly, he knows what happens to the families who don’t contribute. If he tells me to stop doing all this, he knows our reputation will suffer. People will doubt if we are good Jews and good Zionists, they will exclude us. I remind him of that when he wants a hot meal with ten different items.<sup>266</sup>

Sarai laughed as she finished the last sentence. She was pleased at her ‘ingenious’ ways of negotiating the domestic and the political. Her laughter and self-appreciation, cementing for me, the idea of ‘new’ forms and strategies for giving and charitable practices among Zionist settler women.

### **Diasporic Commitments to Quotidian Zionist Charity**

Having discussed how ‘new’ forms of giving enforce norms (and punishments and rewards) around charity and giving, I’d like to mention the role of Diasporic Jewish communities to daily charity of Zionist settler

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Conversation with Sarai, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 5 September 2014.

dichotomies between *Western/Non-Western* and *liberal/illiberal* women but also signifies the larger neglect of the mundane and *everyday* in the *search for agency*. I, thus, argue that examinations of agency need to be re-framed; the dreary and monotonous task of *looking for agency* needs to be side-lined. The question—*do they possess agency?*—as well as the recognition of agents, previously denied agency, need to be replaced by the more important questions – *what does agency do? How does it transform, negotiate, normalise, and maintain the everyday?* (Hemmings & Kabesh, 2013). This thesis has been a first step in illustrating the workings of agency as it enables an *everyday politics* of violence, nationalism, and settler colonialism; carves space for women’s mobilisation within patriarchal projects; shapes women’s bargains and negotiations in the home and beyond; and re-configures social and political categories through pedagogy, charity, intimacy, and violence. It necessitates a continuation of research on re-framed questions of/on agency.

### **7.5 Listening to Right-Wing Women; Speaking to Feminist International Relations**

While this thesis has engaged with multidisciplinary debates on women’s politics, gender, and feminist studies, it speaks to feminist international relations in particular and significant ways.

At the onset it addresses Enloe’s (1989) pertinent question – *Where are the Women?* It then complicates this question with insights from poststructural feminist international relations that focus on diversity, difference, pluralities, and hyphenated and contested identities, asking – *Where are the Right-Wing Women? Why have their politics been ignored? Why have even feminist scholars reduced them to un-empowered victims and non-actors in international politics?* (Tickner, 1992; Sylvester, 2002; Parashar, 2013, 2014; Gentry & Sjoberg, 2007,

women. Interestingly, the norms of giving are *bent* in three ways to accommodate members of the Diaspora and their 'quotidian' charitable acts.

First, while time and physical dedication (and visibility) is considered a *must* when it comes to charitable acts of settler women, for members of the Diaspora, funding is seen as an understandable (if not satisfactory) means of involvement. As Tamar, who handles Women in Green's budget, elaborates,

There are two types of people who feel guilty about *us* doing all this work to protect the *frontier* and our borders. There are the Jews who are living in America, Europe, Canada, Australia and even places like South Africa, who do not want to leave these places and move their lives to a place where violence is routine. They *really* do care about the cause, and also about us, but either can't move here or just don't want to move here. They send us money through donations and we use that money for our activities and for building schools, playgrounds, parks, cafes, medical centres, and all that. We are okay with that kind of charity because we understand that this life is not for everyone and because we also need these people to make money in the Western world and send it to us so we can continue fighting. There are also Jews who live in Tel Aviv and elsewhere, not those left-wing Israelis who don't give a shit about us and about Israel, but others who are right-wing and who care that *we* are protecting them and that we are the reason they can live in peace. They don't want to come to the settlements but they give us donations. Sometimes I feel angry at them but I also understand.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Interview with Tamar, West Jerusalem, Israel-Palestine, 25 August 2014.

2015). It highlights the limitations of linguistic categories, deconstructs gender binaries, asserts the significance of intersectionality and multiple lenses, and deploys gender as a unit of analysis to interrogate international politics (ibid.). It foregrounds the *everyday* as a site of politics, violence, bargains and negotiations, and contestations and contradictions; it asserts that the *everyday* is indeed the *international* (Enloe, 1983, 2000; Parashar, 2013, 2014; Cockburn, 2010; Wibben, 2010; Sylvester, 2012; Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2015).

I highlight that violence, war, conflict, occupation, settler-colonialism, exclusionary nationalism, and divisive politics extend beyond states and macro-politic and necessitate a nuanced feminist analysis. They are enabled by *everyday* bodies, enacted in quotidian spaces, and captured in the emotions and experiences of people (Parashar, 2013). Political violence, seen as a male domain (in both perpetuation and study), is perpetrated, planned, and patronised by women such as my interlocutors (Parashar, 2013, 2014; Gentry & Sjoberg, 2007, 2015). This thesis, thus, also dispels 'explanations' of women's violence as irrational, illustrating the politics behind/of their aggression (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2007, 2015). It pushes debates on women and political violence further by re-thinking the links between motherhood and violence.<sup>642</sup> Paying attention to the social and the affective, I also engage with debates on emotions and feelings in feminist international relations, arguing for an understanding of the intimate in the politics of right-wing wing. Finally, I embrace a *methodology of unease* and a *reflexivity of discomfort* and reflect on the methodological and ethical decisions and challenges that surround researching violence and women whose politics differ from those of the researcher; I use ethnography and narratives as means of analyses and

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<sup>642</sup> See *Chapter Six*, p.309

Second, since Diaspora Zionists do not contribute in regular physically present ways; new modalities are used to render them *visible*. As Leah mentioned,

Charity comes from within, we know that, and it is in our hearts to give. When someone gives us money, sometimes it is not enough to just use it; we have to acknowledge it in bigger ways—announce where it came from and we use plaques and even banners to make these announcements. We also write about them on our Facebook and blog. It is not only to thank them but to show that our communities, wherever they are, really care about giving and social work and homeland.<sup>268</sup>

Third, as elaborated in *Chapter Three*, numerous visitors from the Jewish Diaspora visit the settlements for pedagogical ‘tourism’. Much like those by ‘Western’ youngsters (and postcolonial elite youth in the ‘Global South’), some of these ‘trips’ can be considered a form of ‘gap-year’ and volunteerism-abroad travels. Furthermore, these trips are not about ‘saving’ an oppressed community but about visible solidarity, resistance, resilience, and a demonstration of love for the land—even from those living afar. It is also pertinent to mention while these trips are usually not long, the large number of volunteers and visitors and their staggered arrival/stay render their presence as quotidian.<sup>269</sup> As Nadia said, “*there is always someone; a group, a family, or even an individual, who is visiting and helping us with our work*”.<sup>270</sup>

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In this section, I have nuanced the quotidian practices of charity espoused and embodied by Zionist settler women and examined how these gendered efforts

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<sup>268</sup> Conversation with Leah, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 31 August 2014.

<sup>269</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 23 August 2014.

<sup>270</sup> Conversation with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 22 August 2014.

writing; and I use the visual as a method and a form of narrative.<sup>643</sup> This thesis, thus, furthers several crucial conversations on methods, ethics, narrative, visuals, and the production of feminist knowledges in feminist international relations (Ackerly, Stern & True, 2006; Wibben, 2016).

## 7.6 Narrating Narratives: A Final Note

In the final pages of Chinua Achebe’s (1958:146-148) book, *Things Fall Apart*, the protagonist, Okonkwo, commits suicide by hanging himself from a tree. Killing oneself was the most dishonourable act a person could commit in the Igbo community; his kin could not touch his lifeless body; he had to be buried by a stranger—the colonizer. He chose to die in despair of his fate at the hands of the white man; he chose to die as a final act of resistance to the colonization of his land and people. His death was symbolic of the end of Igbo life and of the violence of colonialism. The British District Commissioner arrived at the Okonkwo’s compound; he saw Okonkwo’s corpse hanging from a tree, instructed someone to take it down, and walked away, thinking about the book he was planning to write, *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*. He thought of Okonkwo’s death and the stories he would tell.

Every day brought him some new material. The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate (Achebe, 1958:147-48)

The colonizer took decades of Okonkwo’s life—his childhood, his adulthood, his old age, his *everyday* narratives, his fury, his wars, his tears, his joy—his

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<sup>643</sup> See *Chapter Two*, p.53

allow for the construction of the moral right-woman subject, give her the means to “govern” and shape the subjectivities of those around here, and mediate gendered bargains in the everyday. In the next section, I want to unpack the transformations in these practices during ‘special’ times of war.

#### 4.3 Beyond the Quotidian: Zionist Settler Women’s Service and Charity in ‘Special’ Times of ‘War’

The fieldwork for this thesis coincided with Israel’s *Operation Protective Edge*<sup>271</sup>—the assault on Gaza and parts of the West Bank in the summer of 2014. War was everywhere in heightened quantities—in every inch of Gaza, in the homes of Palestinians, in conversations on Israeli buses and cafes, in the *hasbara* (public relations/propaganda) of the state, on the television, and in the everyday politics of settler women.<sup>272</sup> For my interlocutors everyday political mobilisation centred on a deep pervasive insecurity emanating from the actions of the Arab ‘other’ and the war on Gaza intensified their calls to violence and *action*. Feminist scholars of international relations, security studies, and anthropology have examined in depth how war transforms gender norms and relations, doing both—rendering women more vulnerable to violence and opening up new avenues for women’s participation and politics (Enloe, 1993; Tickner, 1993; Lorentzen & Turpin, 1998; Al-Ali, 2007; Kirby, 2012; Sylvester, 2012). In this section, I build on their work and argue that war and times of heightened assault and violence provide my Zionist interlocutors with transformed spaces of charity and service that stand apart

<sup>271</sup> To understand the scope and enormity of this assault on Gaza, see B’TSELEM interactive report on the summer of 2014 - [http://www.btselem.org/2014\\_gaza\\_conflict/en/](http://www.btselem.org/2014_gaza_conflict/en/)  
For more ‘information’ on Operation Protective Edge as compiled by the IDF see the IDF Blog run by IDF Spokesperson’s Unit - <https://www.idfblog.com/operationgaza2014/#Home>

<sup>272</sup> This is not to minimize the everyday brutality of everyday settler colonialism and occupation where violence is *always* everywhere.

tragic death, and his resistance and condensed into a mere paragraph. One hundred and forty eight pages of Achebe’s novel would make one small paragraph in the colonizer’s handbook.<sup>644</sup>

Hindu right-wing women and Zionist settler women narrated Palestinian lives, Muslim lives, Christian lives, *left-wing* lives, *secular* lives, and *anti-national* lives in similar and truncated ways. Multiple stories and plural narratives, shaped to fit the moulds of the ‘other’ and legitimise violence and enable a politics of cultural nationalism and settler colonialism. Dominant feminist scholarship narrated right-wing women’s lives in similar and abridged ways. A plethora of experiences, expectations, bargains, mediations, and politics reduced to victimhood, monoliths, and dichotomies. And while narrative feminist research reclaims the importance of the everyday in the international, presenting *alternative* voices and unheard stories of peoples, places, and events, and necessitating the interrogation of power in/and the production of knowledges; I too am constrained by academic disciplining, ethical challenges, methodological impediments, space, time, word counts, funding, silences, and the multiple personal-political worlds I construct and inhabit. I listened, I *observed*, I spoke, I reflected, and I wrote; for the limitations of my narrations, reader, I ask you to forgive me.

<sup>644</sup> I remain indebted to Himadeep Muppidi for several conversations about Chinua Achebe and Things Fall Apart.

from quotidian ones and facilitate the production of unique right-wing subjectivities.

To elaborate: On an evening in August 2014, I was in a café in the settlement of *Kiryat Arba* with my interlocutors Sarai and Malka. Israeli *hasbara* had been harping on about *the war* and how *necessary* it was. My interlocutors could not stop talking about the bomb sirens in different parts of Israel, about how afraid yet strong everyone was, and about how they will continue to fight and live in this time of fear and instability. Malka, who had recently made *aaliyah* from India, speaking about her childhood in India and the 1972 war with Pakistan, said,

I was a teenager and I felt so insignificant. We would hear on the news that soldiers were dying and we did nothing.<sup>273</sup>

Sarai, in conversation with her, asked,

How do you feel here? Do you feel that you are contributing?

Malka immediately lit up and said,

Yes! I feel like I am much closer to the soldiers and their lives here. I can't fight but my son was a soldier. I go and visit soldiers and bring them the things they need. I can help here.

Sarai then began to narrate an anecdote from the previous week. Speaking emotionally, she said,

Last week, I wanted to do something for the soldiers; something good and holy. So my friend and I, we went door to door in *Kiryat Arba*, asking for people to donate *tzitzityot*<sup>274</sup> for our soldiers. We collected

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<sup>273</sup> Conversation with Malka and Sarai, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 28 August 2014.

<sup>274</sup> Tzitzityot are tassels attached to the four corners of the *tallit* (the prayer shawl) and *tallit katan* (the everyday undergarment) worn by observant Jewish males.

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over sixty-five of them and then we took them to that new synagogue we built. The one I showed you.<sup>275</sup>

She looked at me for acknowledgement and I nodded. She continued,

The Rabbi there blessed them and then I went to the Army barracks near where the fighting is taking place. We went with a convoy and I carried these blessed garments with me. I got there and gave it to the soldiers and they were so happy to have them. They wore them every day. And you know what, Akanksha, not one of those soldiers has died. Not one of the soldiers who wore a *tzitzit* from me and blessed by our rabbi has even been injured. They are all safe. *H'Shem* is protecting our soldiers and we are helping him.<sup>276</sup>

Sarai's act of charity and assistance is significant and speaks to the themes in this chapter and the literature on gender and war in three ways.

First, Sarai's service allowed her to feel like she was contributing to the war efforts even if she was no longer (or in her case, never) a soldier. As a civilian, yet one who was "on the frontier" she elaborated,

We protect this land everyday with our efforts—we fight for it and we maintain it. And people help us. But now there is a time when soldiers need to fight much more for this land in a different way. So I as a frontier woman, as a frontier civilian can do two things—continue doing my work to guard and nourish this frontier, and help and give to the soldiers who protect us during this war.<sup>277</sup>

Like Sarai, for some of my other interlocutors who had moved to Israel when they were older and beyond the age of conscription, 'formal' time as soldiers

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<sup>275</sup> Conversation with Malka and Sarai, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 28 August 2014.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

Al-Ali, N. S. (2007). *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present*. London ; New York: Zed Books.

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Bacchetta, P., & Power, M. (Eds.). (2002). *Right-Wing Women: From Conservatives to Extremists Around the World*. New York: Routledge.

never existed. However, they saw themselves as soldiers as they lived on the ‘frontier’ and defended it. ‘Wartime’ like the summer of 2014 provided them with opportunities to conduct charitable efforts and through them meet soldiers, partake in the war, shift gender norms, and share their experiences of being *frontier soldiers*, and produce themselves as ‘good’ militarily relevant subjects.

Second, while quotidian charitable acts by settler women also rely on and enforce forms of visibility, ‘special’ wartime contributions, like the one made by Sarai, intensify this visibility and performance and the rewards associated with such ‘goodness’. Photographs are clicked and posted Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, blogs, and websites, *hashtagged* and circulated. Local media covers these events and showcases the women who champion them.<sup>278</sup> Women in Green and local communities publicise these contributions online and in their meetings/gatherings. Thus, giving during wartime is not only made *visible* as quotidian ways of giving are but gathers stronger recognition, *viral* notice, and stronger applause.

Third, Sarai’s act—with a religious element to it—allows settler women to assert the *religious* in the *national-religious* and emphasize that the land of *Eretz Yisrael* was divinely bestowed upon the Jewish people and its Jewish residents are sacred subjects that *must* be fought for and protected through any means. Interestingly, the synagogue that Sarai refers to in her narration (one she took me to), is called Chazon David *shul* and is one built right outside *Kiryat Arba* in extremely contested land.<sup>279</sup> It had undergone dozens of demolitions (as of 2014) on orders of the Israeli state and thus, Sarai’s act of charity also asserted

<sup>278</sup> Multiple visits to the WIG Website - <http://womeningreen.org/> and the WIG Facebook page - <http://bit.ly/2bu5iQA>

<sup>279</sup> Fieldnotes, Kiryat Arba, West Bank, Palestine, 28 August 2014.

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the symbolic importance of this persevering religious site (especially to the Israeli state).<sup>280</sup>

Sarai's individualised efforts here find a place in a larger pool of such acts of charity during 'special' times of war. Ranging from raising money and supplies to holding prayer ceremonies and helping families of soldiers, these acts are varied yet consistent. To nuance the discussions in this subsection further, I'd like to delve into two examples that I noted during my fieldwork with the settler women in the summer of 2014.

The first example I'd like to examine is the very occupation and building of one of my main field sites—the outpost-settlement of Givat Oz V'Gaon, a hill right off the Gush Etsyon junction in the Southern West Bank. In *Chapter Two* as I 'located' the site(s) of my ethnography, I mentioned that Women in Green 're-claimed' this hill in early July 2014 after it was announced that Gilad Shaer, Eyal Yifrah, and Naftali Frenkel—the three boys who had been kidnapped on 12 June 2014 had been found dead. My interlocutors began a massive drive to settle and 'nurture' this hill.<sup>281</sup> As Debbie, a member of the organization, notes in a piece in *Arutz Sheva* dated 21 July 2014,

Out of the grief and horror over the unspeakable loss of these precious boys and the war that has started, came a positive, uplifting, and Zionist response—the creation of another spot on the Israeli map with a Jewish presence.... These young women, along with dozens of young people from Gush Etzion and all over Israel, have been living on the site for the last several weeks, volunteering and giving even during these wartimes, and have been the backbone of the project, providing

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<sup>280</sup> Read about the demolitions of this synagogue on the Hamodia Newspaper-  
<http://hamodia.com/2015/04/15/outpost-shul-demolished-near-kiryat-arba/>

<sup>281</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 8 August 2014.

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the labour required to clean up and organize the site... We only had to bring only a tent and our own food and equipment, but we were provided with an incalculable and enduring dose of inspiration and the excitement of witnessing Zionism in its most beautiful form.<sup>282</sup>

The hill and the outpost-settlement that was built on it had become markers of the charitable effort and goodness in Zionist settler women in serving the land and its people in particularly difficult times. The hill and its sustenance made *visible* and symbolic the resilience, resistance, and the (gendered) Zionist presence during a time of war. For my interlocutors, this act of charity and ‘nurture’ provided a flurry of noticeability and applause on social media, local media, as well as in their communities and families. As Nadia, who spearheaded this effort, phrased it,

We can’t always be on the frontlines of war. I would love to go and drop bombs on Gaza, but I can’t. So we do what we can in our community and we scream loudly that we are here, we are present, we will take what is ours. You kill our children and we won’t let their deaths go waste. We will take the land where you kill them. We will not go anywhere and we will fight you. Our soldiers will fight you at the borders and we will fight you in Zionist ways. We will help the war by providing this; a space to come together—a space we have taken back from the Arabs—a space on our land and we will make sure that people can see how we give to our communities even during war, even when they are killing us more than they always are.<sup>283</sup>

<sup>282</sup> Sylvetsky, Rochel. 21 July 2014. *In Memory of Gil-ad, Ayal and Naftali: Givat Oz V’Gaon*. Arutz Sheva. <http://bit.ly/2aVvKQm> Accessed 1 August 2014.

<sup>283</sup> Conversation with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V’Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 8 August 2014.

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- C-Info (2014, August 8). Communalism Watch: Reena Pushkarna of Overseas BJP Israel Chapter Serves Biryani to Israeli troops. *Communalism Watch*. Retrieved



The second example I'd like to provide is of a charitable drive organised by Women in Green in July 2014. The drive did not focus on essential items but instead asked women to put together *gift and care packages for soldiers*. A group of my interlocutors then made a well-documented journey from the site of the kidnapping of the boys—the Gush Etsyon junction and Givat Oz V'Gaon—to barracks in the south and handed over these packages. Home-baked goods, coffee-making kits, hand-knitted socks and scarves, chocolates, stuffed toys, and books etc. were items that were being collected for the drive.<sup>284</sup> As Nadia and Yehudit noted in a mass email to members,

The soldiers' gathering places are makeshift areas, on the sand, where the sun beats down during the day and penetrates the shade that is stretched over the soldiers' heads to protect them from the sun. There is no escape from the sun... We just wanted to do something good for them. Make them feel loved and cared for.<sup>285</sup>

On a Wednesday night in the last week of July 2014, armed with these *care packages* neatly arranged with prominent stickers of the organisation's logo positioned on each of them, my interlocutors from Women in Green left the drove to an undisclosed location for soldiers in Southern Israel. They took lots of photographs as they loaded the cars and arrived at the barracks just before midnight.<sup>286</sup> As Nadia elaborated in a blog post and later in an interview with me,

After a few moments of disorientation we arrived at the area close to midnight. We found the soldiers to be totally alert despite the hour and in very good spirits. We saw how motivated they are, and how aware of the importance of their operational mission; they understand that

<sup>284</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 4 August 2014.

<sup>285</sup> Accessed through the private WIG Google group, Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 9 September 2014.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

from <http://communalism.blogspot.com/2014/08/reena-pushkarna-overseas-bjp-israel.html>

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the security of the People of Israel rests on their shoulders and are prepared to do the work joyfully. We just wanted to serve them and give them some more joy.<sup>287</sup>

Yehudit added to this in another conversation on the same day,

Whenever we do anything in *Judea* and *Samaria*, soldiers help us. Even when they are instructed to stop us, they still help us as much as they can. In times of tension and war, they are still there for us. So women from the different communities in these regions have always given as much as possible to the soldiers—from clothing to deodorants to sweets and more. This effort was just a more organised one.<sup>288</sup>

The two examples I have provided allow me to make four arguments about practices of charity here. First, like in the case with Sarai's charitable effort, wartime service allows settler women to *make themselves visible* in *grandiose* ways and to assert their presence as political and strategic subjects. It allows them to express their gratitude to soldiers and yet at the same time draw rewards and applause for their own behaviour. Second, due to the *viral* presence of this *visibility* (online and offline), these rewards during wartime provide them with more prestige and power within their communities, allowing them to set more examples and norms and use them to govern 'populations' in the settlements. Third, as women actors, it also allows them to straddle the feminine (with their acts of giving, gifting, and caring) with the 'feminist' (in terms of agency, action, and politics). While women have been contributing to wartime for centuries, new modalities of documentation,

<sup>287</sup> Conversation with Nadia Matar, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 8 September 2014.

<sup>288</sup> Conversation with Yehudit Katsover, Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 8 September 2014.

- Coronil, F., & Skurski, J. (1991). Dismembering and Remembering the Nation: The Semantics of Political Violence in Venezuela. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 33(2), 288–337.
- Corwin, A. I. (2012). Changing God, Changing Bodies: The Impact of New Prayer Practices on Elderly Catholic Nuns' Embodied Experience. *Ethos*, 40, 390–410.
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- Danchev, A. (2009). *On Art and War and Terror*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Dandekar, G. N. (2013). *Maa! Ab to kholo dwaar*. New Delhi: Suruchi Prakashan
- Das, V. (2006). *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
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- Dauphinee, E. (2013). *The Politics of Exile*. London, New York: Routledge.
- De Montigny, G. (1995). *Social Working: An Ethnography of front-line Practice*. Toronto: Toronto University Press
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presentation, and *visibility* magnify settler women's assistance and their moral subjectivities.

Fourth, charitable acts during these 'special' times of war highlight the complex relationships and tensions between settler women, soldiers in the IDF, and Israeli parliamentarians. As has been drawn out of the narratives in this thesis, IDF soldiers often safeguard and surround settlements and outposts, garnering love and care from the settler communities. However, acting on the orders of their superiors and politicians, they also demolish, disrupt, and halt the activities and architectures of settler women. In their narratives, my interlocutors constructed the IDF soldier to be an *unwilling enforcer* who interfered in the heroic efforts of settler women *only* on orders by politicians in power.<sup>289</sup> Fighting IDF soldiers as they *intervened* with settler women's activities was always seeped in an aura of reluctance (from both sides). Visiting soldiers in their barracks during a time of war, laden with loving care packages, was thus a symbolic act of self-fashioning the settler woman as a subject who was immensely grateful for the IDF and at the same time was profoundly critical of political leaders and their failings to *secure* the land of Israel, especially *Judea* and *Samaria*. To cement this argument, I'd like to point to a quote by Nadia in an email she sent to members in July 2014,

We very much recommend for the ministers and the members of Knesset to drop in, not for the soldiers, but for themselves, to feel the heartbeat of the People, to see our army, composed from the entire People of Israel, from Yitzhar to Eilat, from Ramat Gan to Beit-El.<sup>290</sup>

<sup>289</sup> An example of this is the narrative of Sarah Nachson in the Introduction to *Chapter Three*.

<sup>290</sup> Accessed through the private WIG Google group, Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 9 September 2014.

- Desai, M., & Roy, I. (2016). Development Discourse and Popular Articulations in Urban Gujarat. *Critical Asian Studies*, 48(1), 1–26.
- Devji, F. (2009). *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity: Militant Islam and Global Politics*. New York: C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd.
- Deutsch, S. (2002). Spartan Mothers: Fascist Women in Brazil in the 1930s. In Bacchetta, P. & Power, M. (Eds.), *Right-Wing Women: From Conservatives to Extremists Across the World*. New York: Routledge.
- Dhaliwal, S., & Yuval-Davis, N. (2014). *Women against Fundamentalism: Stories of Dissent and Solidarity*. London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd.
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- Dworkin, A. (1982). *Right Wing Women*. New York: Coward-McCann Inc.
- Eglash, R. & Branigin, W. (2014, June 30). Israeli Army says three kidnapped teenagers found dead. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/three-kidnapped-israeli-teenagers-found-dead-reports-say/2014/06/30/4e6a271a-007a-11e4-8572-4b1b969b6322\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/three-kidnapped-israeli-teenagers-found-dead-reports-say/2014/06/30/4e6a271a-007a-11e4-8572-4b1b969b6322_story.html)
- Eisenstadt, S. N. (1956). *From Generation to Generation: Age Groups and Social Structure*. New Brunswick, USA; London: Transaction Publishers.
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Her comments, short and seemingly innocent, construct her—the settler women—as the charitable, empathetic, and giving subject and produce the soldiers as the *heartbeat* of Israel. They also frame the parliamentarians and politicians as ineffectual beings; their incompetence being the very reason settler women had to work extra hard to fill in for the state and both its violence and its welfare.

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In this section, I have etched out the nuances of Zionist settler women's charity during 'special' times of war and examined how it transforms the production of their subjectivities and structures of governance. Before I end this section, there are two things I must highlight.

First, 'reclaimed' hills that are converted to outposts and settlements are nurtured through quotidian acts of charity. However, these spaces often transform into sites of congregation and barracks for soldiers during times of 'war'. Thus, for my interlocutors, everyday acts of giving *always* go beyond the quotidian—they are *needed* for higher purposes during times of war. This sets up an important link between the quotidian and the special practices of charity.<sup>291</sup>

Second, as a very interesting point of convergence, I'd like to point to the narrative of Reena Pushkarna, an Indian woman who has been living in Tel Aviv for 30 years. Reena is the owner of a popular Indian restaurant in the city called *Tandoori*. She is also a strong supporter of Israel and the convener

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<sup>291</sup> For example, in August 2014, soldiers who were on the reserve list for the assault on Gaza were being mobilised and housed in Shdema, a hill and an outpost that had been 'reclaimed' and settled by Women in Green in 2013. As Yehudit elaborated in a post on their Facebook page – *Baruch H'Shem*, many reserve soldiers inhabit the Shdema camp, as it should be. The buildings that have been renovated by Women in Green and especially the synagogue that we established at the site are now a warm and comfortable home for the IDF soldiers. Our efforts in every single day of 2013 have paid off. [Paraphrased]

- Engineer, A. A. (1987). *The Shah Bano Controversy*. Bombay: Stosius Inc/Advent Books Division.
- Enloe, C. (1983). *Does Khaki Become You?* London: Pluto Press.
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<http://www.tamaraerde.com/films/this-is-my-land/>
- Eriksson Baaz, M. & Stern, M. (2016). Researching wartime rape in the Democratic Republic of Congo: A methodology of unease. In Wibben, A. T. R. (Ed.). *Researching War: Feminist Methods, Ethics and Politics*. London; New York: Routledge
- Ferrante, E. (2012). *My Brilliant Friend (Neapolitan Novels): 1*. New York, NY: Europa Editions.
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- Foucault, M. (1991). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. (A. Sheridan, Trans.). London: Penguin.

of the Israeli chapter of the Hindu right-wing organisation—Overseas Friends of the BJP. Reena was in the news (Israeli, Indian, and international) in August 2014 as she set up a makeshift kitchen near the border of Israel and Gaza. She cooked 400 kilograms of biryani and served it to over 2000 soldiers.<sup>292</sup> In an interview in September 2014, she elaborates,

My team and I had to dive into trenches twice to keep from getting killed last month. The initiative surely brought smiles to the faces of our soldiers and made me feel like I was making a contribution.<sup>293</sup>

Reena, whose restaurant was also an important site for negotiations during the Oslo accords of 1993, brings together the two movements explored in this thesis in unique ways—through inter-regional organizational links, personal-political stories of migration, food, and practices of charity and giving. Her (short) narrative also allows me to *take this chapter to India* and discuss practices of charity that constitute and are constituted by Hindu right-wing women.

#### 4.4 Hindu Right-Wing Women: ‘Sisters’ in Service and Charity

*“Didi-ma se pooche bina, yahaan toh parinda bhi nahi par uthata” [Without asking didi-ma, here, even a bird does not lift its wings]*<sup>294</sup>

When she uttered this sentence—a string of cautionary words—Rajni, a twenty three year old ‘disciple’ of Sadhvi Rithambara looked at me with

<sup>292</sup> Several outlets covered this—such as the newspaper, the Hindustan Times (<http://bit.ly/2btSSra>) and Hindutva blogs such as Communalism, <http://communalism.blogspot.co.uk/2014/08/reena-pushkarna-overseas-bjp-israel.html>

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Conversation with Rajni, Vrindavan, India, 8 March 2014.

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unwavering eyes. We were just outside the sacred city of *Vrindavan*—where the Hindu God Krishna is said to have spent his childhood—in the *Mathura* district of Uttar Pradesh in North India. Here, 180 kilometres (and a 3.5 hour train ride) away from Delhi, in the *city of temples and widows*, Sadhvi Rithambara, had established her charitable institution—*Vatsalyagram*—on acres of private land. Rithambara, the founder of the militant *Durga Vahini*, the giver of raging speeches full of violence and bloodlust, was now not only a *Sadhvi*—a title given to female *sadhus*/saints that translated to virtuous—but was also *the didi-ma*, the elder-sister-mother of Hindu right-wing women subjects.<sup>295</sup>

I had arrived at *Vatsalyagram* two days before this interaction. Ashwini, the public relations secretary of the organisation, had asked me to get off at the Mathura train station and take a taxi. “Just tell them you are going to visit *Didi-ma* and they will bring you here and charge you a good rate”, she had said.<sup>296</sup> Getting off the taxi, the first thing I noticed was a tall iron gate, closed, with a mammoth hoarding of Rithambara. In her usual saffron clothes with her black hair, unadorned except for a red *tilak* (ritualistic mark) on her forehead, she was smiling. Behind her in this visual was a green forest with a flowing and sparkling waterfall. A *divine* light fell on Rithambara’s head, her arms holding a sleeping baby. Children surrounded her. The whole visual was awkward, with the photoshopped background of the serene and *natural* being especially unfitting. The gate was part of an even taller structure, designed like a grandiose temple—with an elevated stone *mastak* (head) and a *shikhara/vimana* (mountain peak/rising tower) —and indicated that the entire space was *holy*. Ashwini met me in a small office at the entrance, where I was offered water, sweet milky tea, and a place to sit. We had a short chat where she asked me

<sup>295</sup> Fieldnotes, Vrindavan, India, 8 March 2014.

<sup>296</sup> Telephone conversation with Ashwini, New Delhi, India, 5 March 2014.

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(again) about myself and what I aimed to gain out of my stay in this space.<sup>297</sup> Satisfied with my responses about my research, she said, “*You are going to love it here. You might even never want to get out of here and live here, with us, in service, for the rest of your life*”.<sup>298</sup> For a few seconds, her words had me in a panic as I imagined I was walking into a cult behind ironed gates and security guards. I calmed myself down by making sure my phone had network. She then asked Neeti, a young woman, to show me to my room in the guesthouse and brief me on the rules and facilities and *take care* of me during my visit.<sup>299</sup>

My room in the designated visitors’ area and guesthouse was large, fancy-ish, and air-conditioned. Expecting something more austere at this *holy* place, I asked Neeti if all the rooms were this nice. Her response reminded me of the strategic thought that goes into Hindu right-wing women’s charitable practices. She said,

Most of our visitors are donors, especially rich Indian donors coming from abroad. Some others are journalists and researchers like you. We need to make a good impression. And we also need our donors from abroad to feel comfortable; they are used to certain facilities so we have to provide them with that luxury. Only then will they feel at home and want to stay longer and we give us money. We have to show them we are good.<sup>300</sup>

I left my things in the room and followed Neeti downstairs to the dining room. Designed like a restaurant but with longer tables and more chairs, all meals in the premises of the charity were consumed here. The workers, volunteers, inhabitants, and visitors all ate *saatvik* food (vegetarian and natural foods abundant in energy) here in a communal set-up run by Hindu

<sup>297</sup> Fieldnotes, Vrindavan, India, 6 March 2014.

<sup>298</sup> Conversation with Ashwini, Vrindavan, India, 6 March 2014.

<sup>299</sup> Fieldnotes, Vrindavan, India, 6 March 2014.

<sup>300</sup> Conversation with Neeti, Vrindavan, India, 6 March 2014.

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right-wing women volunteers. After a quick meal of *dal*, rice, vegetables, and yoghurt, Neeti took me on a tour of the premises. She insisted I wear *walking-friendly shoes*, as *Vatsalyagram* was huge, like a town on its own “*with no need to ever leave*”.<sup>301</sup> The panic set in again.

The charity consisted of kilometres of land organised with roads, roundabouts, and clear signs, and adorned with gardens, trees, and streetlamps. Near the entrance were the *spiritual* sites. A massive temple to seat 10,000 devotees, designed to maximise *spiritual energies*, was currently under construction on the left. Next to it and opposite it were the public gardens for inhabitants to stroll and relax in. Ahead, on the left, there was the *gaushala* (protective centre for cows)—an assortment of tin roofs, sheds, and hay.<sup>302</sup> <sup>303</sup> As we walked further on, arriving at a major roundabout, Rajni joined us and introduced herself as “*a shadow of didi-ma*”.<sup>304</sup> She had been here for four years—since she was nineteen—and was training in ‘charitable and spiritual management’ under Rithambara. On the right to this junction were the guesthouse and dining hall, which I had already seen. We turned left and a hundred metres down the road, on the right, stood the hospital run by the charity. Following this, further up the road, were the living quarters of the inhabitants—a mix of elderly women abandoned by their families, young widows and runaway women, and children— orphaned and abandoned.<sup>305</sup> As Rajni explained,

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> Since Modi’s election as Prime Minister (in May 2014), cow *vigilantism* has increased considerably throughout India. Killings, beatings, and torture of those accused of eating beef and hurting cows as well as protests of *Dalits* given the tasks of dealing with carcasses of cows have both made it to international news. While food (and cows) have *always* been a central issue for Hindu nationalism, my interlocutors (including Rithambara) use cows for both—a means of policing the ‘other’ and engaging in violence against him as well as for setting up nurturing shelters for taking care of cows.

<sup>303</sup> Fieldnotes, Vrindavan, India, 6 March 2014.

<sup>304</sup> Conversation with Rajni, Vrindavan, India, 6 March 2014.

<sup>305</sup> Fieldnotes, Vrindavan, India, 6 March 2014.

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What *didī-ma* has done is quite amazing. She realised that there were many Hindu groups in society that needed assistance—orphans, old women, and troubled young girls—all thrown out by families and society. So she decided to make a new form of family. Two old ladies, one or two young girls, and two children form a unit here. They live together in this place in small flats. Each family is given an allowance to survive. The old ladies take care of the spiritual things; they work with the cows, in the garden, in the temples. The young girls help with the hospital and the school. And the children can focus on childhood and school. Everything is provided and we have many such Hindu families living together.<sup>306</sup>

Playgrounds and more gardens as well as vegetable farms and fruit orchards surrounded the living quarters containing these new family units that were as queer as they were normative. There were crèches and kindergarten-type spaces for the children, all run by the women who lived there and assisted by volunteers. Up ahead, as we continued to explore, on the left were rows of houses that had saffron garments drying all over their gardens. Neeti mentioned that, “*these were where the ‘shadows of didī-ma’ lived*”.<sup>307</sup> Like Rajni, these were the spaces for Hindu right-wing women who had decided to devote their *entire* lives to the sacred and the political; who wanted to be leaders like Rithambara. We had been walking for an hour and we finally reached the far-end of *Vatsalyagram* (the school). The school, accredited to the central board of secondary education (CBSE) was a privately run school open to the *adopted* children of the space as well as children from surrounding

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<sup>306</sup> Conversation with Rajni, Vrindavan, India, 6 March 2014.

<sup>307</sup> Conversation with Neeti, Vrindavan, India, 6 March 2014.

towns and cities. It was considered a *good* school with a commendable faculty, good facilities, a strong curriculum, and reasonable fees.<sup>308</sup>

Over the next seven days, I stayed in the guesthouse and visited the various parts of this space during the day, *observing*, taking notes, and *hanging out*. I noticed that the hospital saw a lot of patients from around the area and right-wing women volunteered with all aspects—from organisational to medicinal to pastoral—of the space. They managed the queues, registering patients, taking their *vitals*, offering an ear and hand to filling forms and listening to grievances. They decided who was worth the medical care and who had to wait or leave. They also assisted with medical procedures, dealt with outpatients, and consoled distraught families and relatives of the patients. My interlocutors ran every aspect of *Vatsalyagram*—beautifying and planting the gardens, managing the cow and animal shelters, gardening and nurturing the vegetable and fruit gardens, facilitating the *homes* of the *family units*, maintaining the playgrounds, volunteering at the school, and policing the behaviour and morality of all inhabitants. The *shadows of Rithambara* carried out religious and spiritual services—*bhajan* (devotional songs) sessions, yoga and meditation classes, *havans* (fire rituals), observation of holy fasts, and celebratory rituals around festivals. They also carried out a programme of fitness and health—organising and facilitating exercise regimes, athletics and games, sports days, and annual tournaments for the children and young women. They dealt with any conflicts that arose and had their own ‘system’ of delivering verdicts and providing solutions. It was obvious, under the guidance of Rithambara, the Hindu right-wing women maintained and mediated this *entire* space of charity—from administrative and secretarial

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<sup>308</sup> Fieldnotes, Vrindavan, India, 6 March 2014.

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ends to managerial and facilitative ends to cultural and social ends. Not only were they *visible* in this space, they *were* this space.<sup>309</sup>

On the third evening that I was there, I finally had the opportunity to meet Rithambara face-to-face. Having seen her a few times, surrounded by dozens of women, I was groping for a chance to interview her. Ashwini and Neeti promised to try their best to arrange this but asked me to be patient as “*didima had many commitments here and in Delhi*”.<sup>310</sup> On the evening that I met her, I was asked to go to the school playground – “*the annual day function of the school is being celebrated today, go there and attend it and at some point you will get to meet her*”, I was told by Neeti.<sup>311</sup> I walked to the end of *Vatsalyagram*, where the function had already commenced.<sup>312</sup> There was a large makeshift stage at the centre of the playground with a banner of the school and several photographs of Rithambara. Parents, dressed in their finest, sat on satin covered seats in the audience. Teachers, volunteers, and *shadows of Rithambara*, managed the logistics. The programme lasted about two hours. Students from all cohorts performed devotional songs, classical Hindu dances, and short plays with social messages. Halfway into these celebrations, *didima* arrived, in her usual saffron, surrounded by dozens of women and cameras. The parents were overwhelmed by her presence. They clapped, they shouted, they folded their hands in respect; some went to the stage and tried to touch her feet, others took photographs. A few even shed a few tears; one of them telling me that she felt she was in the presence of *the divine Hindu*.<sup>313</sup>

<sup>309</sup> Fieldnotes, Vrindavan, India, 6, 7, 8, 11, and 12 March 2014.

<sup>310</sup> Conversation with Ashwini and Neeti, Vrindavan, India, 7 March 2014.

<sup>311</sup> Conversation with Neeti, Vrindavan, India, 8 March 2014.

<sup>312</sup> The function was named *Taare Zameen Par* (the Stars on the Ground) —a title that referred to children as the celestial beings on earth and was also the name of a famous Bollywood film about children. Appropriation of the name of a popular Bollywood film here made the event more fun and relatable to the attendees.

<sup>313</sup> Fieldnotes, Vrindavan, India, 8 March 2014.

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Rithambara took the stage and thanked everyone that was attending. She said,

This school and space has been a dream of mine. A place where Hindu goodness and charity came together, where the poor and marginal found a home, where families can find a home. I am very proud of what I—we—have created here and this school is an example of this. The only way we can claim this country as our own, as Hindu, is by doing such good work and showing the world that education, service, and social work are our life and calling.<sup>314</sup>

Following her short speech, she sat on the sofa in front of the stage and watched as primary school students put up a ‘fancy-dress competition’. Smiling and applauding as boys and girls dressed up as Hindu heroes, Gods and Goddesses, and even mini versions of *didi-ma*, she seemed totally engrossed in these young pupils’ performances. The event came to an end as *didi-ma* went on stage to do two things—distribute the prizes for the fancy-dress competition and light a lamp of education and goodness to mark the day. As she did the first, she posed with each and every child for numerous photographs, embracing them, holding them, playing with them, and smiling and laughing with them. As she did the second, the faculty and volunteers were all called to stage, each group bringing flowers and sweets for her. Again, she posed for dozens of photographs, but this time she wasn’t embracing any children. Instead, dozens of women extended their arms vying to touch a part of her, any part, with some falling to her feet overwhelmed, desperately seeking her divine blessing.<sup>315</sup>

<sup>314</sup> Speech by Sadhvi Rithambara, Vrindavan, India, 8 March 2014.

<sup>315</sup> Fieldnotes, Vrindavan, India, 8 March 2014.

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Matar, R. (2008, February 8). THE DEATH OF OUTRAGE. *Women In Green Website*. Retrieved from <http://womeningreen.org/the-death-of-outrage/>

McClintock, A. (1991). “No Longer in a Future Heaven”: Women and Nationalism in South Africa. *Transition*, 51, 104–123.

Mcclintock, A. (1995). *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York: Routledge.

McNay, L. (2000). *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

McNay, L. (2013). The Unbearable Lightness of Theory: Political Ontology and Social Weightlessness in Mouffe’s Radical Democracy. In Madhok, S., Phillips, A., & Wilson, K. (Eds.). *Gender, Agency, and Coercion*. Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York, NY: AIAA.

Mehta, A. (2015). The aesthetics of “everyday” violence: narratives of violence and Hindu right-wing women. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 8(3), 416–438.

Mehta, A. (2016). The World Before Her: A Review. *Feminist Dissent*, 1(1), 139–143.



As the evening neared conclusion, I, perplexed by this display of emotion, ran around to find Neeti and see if I could speak to Rithambara. In a few minutes, I was escorted behind the stage, where Rithambara sat on a chair. Neeti introduced us (“the researcher from London”) and I greeted *didi-ma* with folded hands. She touched my cheek as an embrace and asked me to sit down.<sup>316</sup> “I am very glad you are here but I only have a few minutes, so tell me what can I tell you that the others have not”, she said gently.<sup>317</sup> There were a million things I wanted to ask her but I settled for the simple *why* question. *Why did you start Vatsalyagram, Sahdviji?* I muttered. She smiled and said,

Good question. You know my history, don’t you—if you are a good researcher you must. I have been in Hindutva for as long as I can remember. My name used to be Nisha and then I became enlightened and a *sadhvi* and got involved in Hindu organisations. I did everything—I worked with volunteer organisations, went to *Samiti* camps, gave speeches in Ayodhya, trained Hindu women to become soldiers, demolished the Babri *masjid*, fought Muslims and anti-nationals, and even started *Durga Vahini*—to get young women and girls to become warrior Hindu nationalists. I gave up a lot for this path. I never married, never had my own children and as I grew older two things came to my mind. There was something missing in our Hindu movement—a space like this that brought all our work together; why should we have a place for orphans and another place for widows and another for girls who have been left by their families if what we want is to ensure families—then here we go, we can make families on our own. In one space, we can *make* families, give a roof to all these people—left out by society, thrown away—and have schools, hospitals, gardens, our own food, our own cows. Why not? The other thing was more

<sup>316</sup> Fieldnotes, Vrindavan, India, 8 March 2014.

<sup>317</sup> Interview with Sadhvi Rithambara, Vrindavan, India, 8 March 2014.

- Menon, K. D. (2005). We Will become Jijabai: Historical Tales of Hindu Nationalist Women in India. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 64 (1), 103-126.
- Menon, K. D. (2010). *Everyday Nationalism: Women of the Hindu Right in India*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Menon, N. (2015, October 28). Statement of outrage against police crackdown on students at #Occupy UGC: Faculty Feminist Collective, JNU. *Kafila*. Retrieved from <https://kafila.org/2015/10/28/statement-of-outrage-against-police-crackdown-on-students-at-occupy-ugc-faculty-feminist-collective-jnu/>
- Messner, M. (2006). *Out of play: Critical essays on gender and sport*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Mhurchu, A. & Shindo, R. (Ed.). (2016). *Critical Imaginations in International Relations*. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Mill, J.S. (1843). *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive: Being a Connected View of the Principles of Evidence and the Methods of Scientific Investigation, Volume 1*. Google eBook. Accessed on March 24, 2013  
[http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=y4MEAAAQAAJ&vq=method+of+agreement&source=gb\\_s\\_navlinks\\_s](http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=y4MEAAAQAAJ&vq=method+of+agreement&source=gb_s_navlinks_s)
- Miller, D. (Ed.). (2005). *Materiality*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Mirza, H. S. (Ed.). (1997). *Black British Feminism: A Reader*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Moallem, M. (2014). Praying through the senses: The Prayer Rug/Carpet and the Converging Territories of the Material and the Spiritual. *Conversations: An Online Journal of the Centre for the Study of Material and Visual Cultures of Religion*. Retrieved from <http://mavcor.yale.edu/conversations/essays/praying-through-senses-prayer-rugcarpet-and-converging-territories-material-and>
- Moghadam, V. M. (Ed.). (1994). *Identity Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Mogul, P. (2015, October 5). Modi UK visit: Labour MPs donate pay rise for Indian Prime Minister’s welcome reception. *International Business Times*. Retrieved

personal; I had done so much for Hindutva—violence; speeches; work—but I didn’t become a mother. Now I can be everything. I am a mother of hundreds now. A sister and a mother to thousands. People say women in our movement and *sadhvis* must not have a family—I found a way to have one.<sup>318</sup>

I had a chance to ask her a few more things about the funding and running of the space; questions that were addressed with perfunctory answers that I had already heard. Soon, her assistants began to appear, interrupting us, and she stood up and apologised for her departure. She promised to see me another time during my week at *Vatsalyagram*. A promise that she did not keep. As I walked back to the guesthouse much after dark with Rajni and two other *sadhvis* in training, I asked them how Rithambara ran this place if she was always so busy. *Does she leave the running of this place to other women?* Rajni laughed and uttered the very words that introduced this section. The women *did* run the day-to-day but ‘without *didima’s* wishes nothing happened here, even birds did not fly’. As we neared their *huts*, I asked them why they had left behind everything—their homes, families, towns, and most material comforts—to live here.<sup>319</sup> Reema, a woman who hadn’t uttered a word to me, looked shocked and snapped,

Why did you leave your home, family, and town to live in London? Because you want to achieve something, right? Your PhD? A new life? Find a place where you feel safe? I am here because I want to achieve something—I want to serve Hindus; I want to make our country a Hindu country; I want to be like *didima*, courageous and giving and selfless; I want to attain *nirvana* through all this. Leaving the world behind is a small sacrifice given what I have gained and done. And my

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Fieldnotes, Vrindavan, India, 8 March 2014.

from <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/labour-mps-donate-pay-rise-welcome-indian-prime-minister-narendra-modi-uk-1522515>

- Moore, C. (2006). Reading the hermeneutics of violence: the literary turn and Chechnya. *Global Society*, 20(2), 179–198.
- Morgensen, S.L. (2012). Theorising Gender, Sexuality and Settler Colonialism: An Introduction. *Settler Colonial Studies*, 2 (2), 2-22.
- Moser, A. (2003). Acts of resistance: the performance of women’s grassroots protest in Peru. *Social Movement Studies*, 2(2), 177–190.
- Mukta, P. (2000). The public face of Hindu nationalism. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 23(3), 442–466.
- Murugkar, L. (1991). *Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan
- Murphy, D. (2001, June 2). Two Unlikely Allies Come Together in Fight Against Muslims. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/06/02/nyregion/two-unlikely-allies-come-together-in-fight-against-muslims.html>
- Natanel, K. (2016). *Sustaining Conflict: Apathy and Domination in Israel-Palestine*. California: University of California Press.
- Neuman, T. (2000). *Reinstating the Religious Nation: Settlement and Violence in Hebron* (Doctoral Dissertation). University of Illinois: Chicago, IL, USA.
- Neilsen, J. (1990). *“Feminist Research Methods: Exemplary Readings in the Social Sciences”*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Nielsen, K. E. (2004). Doing the “Right” Right. *Journal of Women’s History*, 16 (3), 168-172.
- Nordman, Y. (2013, February 2). Uprooting that which was planted – Women In Green. *Makor Rishon*. Retrieved from <http://womeningreen.org/uprooting-that-which-was-planted/>
- Nordstrom, C. (1997). *A Different Kind of War Story*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.



parents visit me once a year. I wish I could see them more, but I understand that is how life. Don't you?<sup>320</sup>

I had no answers to give. On most days, *I* did not understand why I had chosen to *leave* and *make a life* so far away from so much I loved. And on other days, I did. I *almost* wished for Reema's clarity.

Spending the rest of my days with other women in *Vatsalyagram*, I only saw Rithambara in the distance, surrounded by people. She addressed me as parts of groups and acknowledged my presence but we did not get a moment by ourselves. On my last day at *Vatsalyagram*, Rithambara addressed the morning session in the *yogashala* (yoga home), something she apparently did every time she was on the premises. She looked at the young and old women and at me with a determined gaze and said,

Take care of your bodies, they are your weapons. Your mind and soul are your pride—your qualities—the way in which you will find peace and goodness and serve others. Your body is the weapon, because it is not enough to be good. You also need to fight the bad. And we know who is bad in our nation. We know who is bad for us Hindus. Never forget that. Stretch your muscles as you chant *Om*. Let your soul and body feel together.<sup>321</sup>

She exited soon after the session commenced. Later that day, I was ready to leave and catch the train back to Delhi. I met Neeti at the office of the entrance. She asked me to sign the guestbook and took me a room inside. The room had a three-dimensional model of *Vatsalyagram* under a glass and photos of Rithambara. It also hosted her awards and certificates as well as rows of books and CDs. Neeti gave me a selection of Rithambara's writings in

Nordstrom, C. (2002). Four Ways to Tell a Story on Violence. *Reviews in Anthropology*, 31(1), 1–19.

O'Donohue, J. (2000). *Conamara Blues: A Collection of Poetry*. London: Transworld Publishers.

O'Rourke, M. (2014). Bleurgh! *Inter/Alia: A Journal of Queer Studies*, 9, 94–126.

Pahuja, N. (2012) *The World Before Her* [Documentary Film]. Canada. <http://www.worldbeforeher.com/>

Pain, R. (2014). Everyday terrorism Connecting domestic violence and global terrorism. *Progress in Human Geography*, 38(4), 531–550.

Pain, R. (2015). Intimate war. *Political Geography*, 44, 64–73.

Pain, R., & Staeheli, L. (2014). Introduction: intimacy-geopolitics and violence. *Area*, 46(4), 344–347.

Paine, R. (1969). In Search of Friendship: An Exploratory Analysis in Middle Class Culture. *Man*, 4 (4), 505–524

Panizza, F. (2005). *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*. New York and London: Verso

Pappe, I. (2007). *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Reprint edition). Oxford: OneWorld Publications.

Parashar, S. (2013). What wars and “war bodies” know about international relations? *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26(4), 615–630.

Parashar, S. (2014). *Women and Militant Wars: The politics of injury*. London ; New York: Routledge.

Parashar, S. (2016). Women and the matrix of violence: A study of the Maoist insurgency in India. In Wibben, A. T. R. (Ed.). *Researching War: Feminist Methods, Ethics and Politics*. London; New York: Routledge

Pateman, C. (1988). *The Sexual Contract*. Cambridge: Polity.

Pateman, C. (1989). *The Disorder of Women*. Cambridge: Polity.

Pawar, S. (2012). *Veer Maataein*. New Delhi: Suruchi Prakashan.

<sup>320</sup> Conversation with Reema, Vrindavan, India, 8 March 2014.

<sup>321</sup> Fieldnotes, Vrindavan, India, 12 March 2014.

Hindi and hugged me goodbye. She went outside to stop an *auto rickshaw* I could hitch a ride on and as I was leaving, a few steps behind her, I noticed the crib in the corner, a bell on a rope attached to it, placed near a large open window, with a sign outside—*Shishu ko yahaan chhor de aur ghanti bajaye. Dariye mat, aapoko kuch nahin hoga. Hum bacche ko sambhaal lenge* (Leave the baby here and ring the bell. Do not be afraid, nothing will happen to you. We will take care of the child). The orphan had just linked this extraordinary space of Hindu right-wing women’s charity to their quotidian work.<sup>322</sup>

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There are three arguments about Hindu right-wing women and their charitable practices that I’d like to draw from these narratives of *Vatsalyagram*, Sadhvi Rithambara, and her *shadows*.

First, I argue that Rithambara has engineered a space that is a microcosm of Hindu right-wing women’s quotidian charitable practices across the country (and in the Diaspora). Like the women who live, volunteer, and work in *Vatsalyagram*, Hindu right-wing women across the country participate in a myriad of charitable practices—fashioning themselves as ‘good’ women subjects and simultaneously shaping the subjectivities of those they encounter and serve.

In a chapter titled “Benevolent Hindus” in her book, *Everyday Nationalism*, Menon (2010:105-130) examines the social work undertaken by women in the Hindu right. She argues that Hindutva women volunteer at government hospitals regularly, inserting themselves in the state’s framework and establishing their authority over patients and visitors (ibid.:111). She

<sup>322</sup> Fieldnotes, Vrindavan, India, 12 March 2014.

- Penttinen, E. (2013). *Joy and International Relations: A New Methodology*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Perugini, N. & Gordon, N. (2016, September 12). Portrait of an occupation: Human rights of the settler. *Al Jazeera*. Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/09/portrait-occupation-human-rights-settler-160912072250351.html>
- Phạm, Q. N. (2013). Enduring Bonds Politics and Life Outside Freedom as Autonomy. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 38(1), 29–48.
- Pillow, W. (2003). Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 16(2), 175-196.
- Pink, S. (2006). *The Future of Visual Anthropology: Engaging the Senses*. London; New York: Routledge
- Pinney, C. (2004). *“Photos of the Gods”: the Printed Image and Political Struggle in India*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Prashad, V. (2013). *Uncle Swami: South Asians in America Today*. Noida, India: HarperCollins.
- Prashad, V. (2015, December 14). *Shalom Modi: India’s Tilt Toward Israel*, Vijay Prashad at the Kenyon Institute, Jerusalem. [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vCfxS5idiY>
- Puar, J. K. (2006). Mapping US Homonormativities. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 13(1), 67–88.
- Puar, J. K., & Rai, A. (2002). Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots. *Social Text*, 20(3), 117–148.
- Punshi, V. (2008). *Veer Savarkar*. New Delhi: Sahitya Prasar Lok Hithkari Samiti
- Rajagopal, A. (2000). Hindu nationalism in the US: changing configurations of political practice. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 23(3), 467–496.
- Ramaprasad, N. S. (2011). *Jhansi Lakshmi bai*. Bangalore: Rashtrotthana Sahitya

elaborates that they also run schools and vocational and educational programmes as well as spiritual sessions of song and prayer for children in various neighbourhoods and slums (ibid.:111-122). Through this second set of practices they not only shaped themselves as ‘moral’ educators but also had the authority to design the curriculum, control the classroom and learning experience, incorporate ethno-religious, socio-cultural, and caste-based elements, discipline their students, and maintain hierarchies.<sup>323</sup> Narratives from my interlocutors—especially Asha and Vanita—add to Menon’s ethnography, highlighting that right-wing women also run and control orphanages and adoption-centres and offer ‘counselling’ services to their communities.

Through all these activities, unfolding in various spatialities (from living rooms to the streets to the districts and cities) Hindu right-wing women, like their Zionist ‘sisters’, fill in for the state as subjects that both provide welfare and govern. They do the second by exerting various forms of power that rest on a system of rewards, punishment, shaming, and disciplining through norms, and establish whose lives are worth saving, repairing, protecting, educating, nourishing, and grieving, and whose lives are worth violence, denial, and erasure (Foucault, 1991, 2003; Butler, 2006b). Like with the creation of Rithambara’s *modified* family units, they also challenge gender norms and arbitrate with the men in the movement. The narratives from Rithambara’s space highlight the modalities and locations of women’s work in the wider Hindu right-wing. On the other hand, narratives from *outside* of this space, illustrate the systems of governance of right-wing women, those that function without iron gates and security guards.

<sup>323</sup> Chapter Three that elaborates on pedagogical practices and content of Hindu right-wing women reflects this claim. Imagery, text, narrative, mythology and history, and performances shape the subjectivities of the audience and students in Hindu right-wing women’s educational programs. My interlocutors deliberately incorporate all these.

- Ramaswamy, S. (2010). *The Goddess and the Nation*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books.
- Ravi, S. (2015, October 1). Why India man was lynched over beef rumours. *BBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-34409354>
- Rancière, J. (2006). *The Politics of Aesthetics*. London ; New York: Continuum.
- Reardon, B. (1999). *Women and Weapons: The Militarist Sexist Symbiosis*. In Brieness, I. (Ed.) *Towards a Women’s Agenda for a Culture of Peace*. Paris: UNESCO
- Rebhun, U., & Lev Ari, L. (2010). *American Israelis: Migration, Transnationalism, and Diasporic Identity*. BRILL Online books. Retrieved at <http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/books/9789004186736>
- Reitz, J.C. (1998). How to do Comparative Law. *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, 46 (4), 617-636
- Richter, L.K. (1995). Gender and race: neglected variables in tourism research, in Change in Butler, R. & Pearce, D. (Eds.). *Tourism: People, Places, Processes*. London: Routledge.
- Rithambara, S. (2012). *Aatmasukh ki Orr*. New Delhi: Vatsalya Prakashan
- Rithambara, S. (2013). *Jaagon, Bharat ki Nari*. New Delhi: Vatsalya Press.
- Rojek, C. (2005). An outline of the action approach to leisure studies. *Leisure Studies*, 24 (1), 13–25.
- Rojek, C. (2010). *The labour of leisure*. London: Sage.
- Rose, J. (1988). Margaret Thatcher and Ruth Ellis. *New Formations*, 6, 3–29.
- Rose, G. (1993). Progress in geography and gender - or something else. *Progress in Human Geography*, 17 (4), 531-537.
- Rose, G. (1994). Engendering and degendering. *Progress in Human Geography*, 18 (4), 507-515.
- Rose, G. (1995). Geography and Gender, cartographies and corporealities. *Progress in Human Geography*, 19 (4), 544-548.
- Roy, A. (1997). *The God of Small Things*. New Delhi: IndiaInk.

Second, while the space that Rithambara has constructed is *extraordinary* in several ways, as the first point has argued, it holds *ordinary* and daily practices of charity. This pushes me to ask – *Are there any special practices of charity for Hindu right-wing women? If so, what are they?* To answer these questions I turn to Menon’s (2010) work again. Menon elaborates on the right-wing’s service efforts during and after the Indo-Pak Kargil war of 1999. Women were at the forefront of organizing commemorations for martyrs and their widows, reaching out to their Hindu audience through affective performances of nationalism, goodness, and service (Menon, 2010:122-128). My interlocutors in Mumbai, Pune, and Thane added to this by mentioning how they are important responders and helpers in the aftermath of major environmental disasters, accidents, fires, terrorist attacks, and other losses of *Hindu lives* in the state of Maharashtra. They go to the sites of these events, offering assistance of all kinds and also ‘look after’ the families of the dead.<sup>324</sup> They use terror attacks by alleged ‘Islamic extremists’ to further vilify the Muslim community in the country. These engagements, I argue, are what can be considered *special* acts of charity. They allow my interlocutors to not only make themselves useful and wanted at times of *heightened* insecurity but they also allow them to shape the subjectivities of those around them through affective and performative actions and imageries. Moreover, they also make my interlocutors *visible* in non-domestic ways where women are not teachers, nurses, cooks, and NGO workers but bodies that survive and negotiate danger and instability and beings that are rough, brave, and hardened. I will elaborate more on this in the concluding *Section 6.6* to this chapter.

Third, Rithambara’s towering presence (and absence) at this site of Hindu right-wing charity compels me to analyse her subjectivities and narratives in

<sup>324</sup> Fieldnotes, Mumbai, India, April 15 2014; Pune, India, July 10 2014.

- Ruddick, S. (1998). Women of Peace: A feminist construction. In Lorentzen, L. & Turpin, J. (Eds.). *The Women and War Reader*. New York: New York University Press
- Rupp, L. J. (1997). Mother of the ‘Volk’: The Image of Women in Nazi Ideology. *Signs*, 3 (2), 362-379.
- Sabar, N. (2012). *Kibbutzniks in the Diaspora*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Safran, W. (1991). Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 1(1), 83–99.
- Safran, W. (2005). The Jewish Diaspora in a Comparative and Theoretical Perspective. *Israel Studies*, 10(1), 36–60.
- Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.
- Sajed, A. (2016, February) *Peripheral/subaltern agency in critical IR: beyond the silence/resistance paradigm?* [Roundtable Presentation] at the International Studies Association (ISA) Annual Convention, 2016, Atlanta, GA, USA.
- Sajed, A. & Hobson, J.M. (2017 *forthcoming*) Navigating beyond the Eurofetishist Frontier of Critical IR Theory: Exploring the complex landscapes of non-Western agency. *International Studies Review* (forthcoming).
- Saran, M. (2016, February 18). Modi’s siege on JNU: Hindutva’s battle for India’s classrooms is out in the open. *Quartz India*. Retrieved from <http://qz.com/619185/modis-siege-on-jnu-hindutvas-battle-for-indias-classrooms-is-out-in-the-open/>
- Sarkar, T. (1998). Orthodoxy, Cultural Nationalism and the Hindu Right. Pearson, R. & Chaudhari, N. (Eds.). *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press
- Sarkar, T. (1999). Pragmatic of the Hindu Right: Politics of Women’s Organizations. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34 (31), 2159-2167.
- Sarkar, T. & Butalia, U. (Eds.). (1998) *Women and Right-Wing Movements: Indian Experiences*. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Savarkar, V. D. (2008). *Pratishod*. New Delhi: Hindi Sahitya Sadan



greater depth. Through her work at *Vatsalyagram*, Rithambara has fashioned new modalities of the family, wherein while she subscribes to the idea of a generational and hierarchical family structure, she also redefines its configuration. This duality ensures that *her* family units (and the life built around them) remain respectable and acceptable even as they challenge socio-cultural norms. In the process, she (re)establishes the project of Hindutva as one of social service and transforms her own self from a 'barren' 'unmarried' and *incomplete* woman to the *childless mother* of hundreds, who was ethical, moral, and *fulfilled*. By rising to the status of an all-seeing and all-knowing *godmother*, she transforms into the figure of *Bharat Mata* (Mother Goddess) and the *Volk Mother*, creating a cult of motherhood around her childless self (McClintock, 1995). By constructing gates that look like ancient temples and a temple that seated 10,000 people, she also engages in a symbolic politics of grandiosity that attracts attention and donations.

Finally, I'd like to mention that the awkward hoarding of Rithambara with a baby and children superimposed on a 'marvellous' scene of natural beauty that I had mentioned in the introduction to this chapter was not an isolated image. *Vatsalyagram* was dotted with *thousands* of these images—some featuring Rithambara with children and scenes of nature, others featuring deities, birds, flowers, animals, and religious and spiritual quotes and poetry (See Figure 4.1). She smiled calmly in all of them, attired in her usual saffron, reflecting her real life persona and performances. These images littered *every* wall, *every* building, and *every* corner of the space; Rithambara was *always* watching you, as you were she.

- Scarry, E. (1987). *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press, U.S.A.
- Schnall, D.J. (1979). *Radical Dissent in Contemporary Israeli Politics: Cracks in the Wall*. New York: Praeger Publishers.
- Schnall, D.J. (1984). *Beyond the Green Line: Israeli Settlements West of the Jordan River*. New York: Praeger Publishers.
- Scheper-Hughes, N. (1993). *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Scheper-Hughes, N. (1998). Maternal Thinking and the Politics of War. In Lorentzen, L. & Turpin, J. (Eds.). *The Women and War Reader*. New York: New York University Press.
- Scheper-Hughes, N. (Ed.). (2003). *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Scruton, S. & Watson, B. (1998). Gendered cities: women and public leisure space in the "postmodern city." *Leisure Studies*, 17(2), 123–137.
- Sen, A. (2008). *Shiv Sena Women: Violence and Communalism in a Bombay Slum*. New Delhi: Zubaan.
- Sethi, M. (2002) Avenging Angels and Nurturing Mothers: Women in Hindu Nationalism. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37 (16), 1545-1552.
- Shams, A. (2014, July 5) Israel and the Palestinian Territories Lonely Planet: Systematic Erasure and Casual Racism. *Jadaliyya*. Retrieved from <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/18392/israel-and-the-palestinian-territories-lonely-plan>
- Shapiro, M. (1999). *Cinematic Political Thought: Narrating Race, Nation and Gender*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Shapiro, M. (2008). *Cinematic Geopolitics*. London: Routledge.
- Sharma, R. P. (2003). *An introduction to Vishwa Hindu Parishad*. New Delhi: Vishwa Hindu Parishad



Figure 4.1: Sadhvi Rithambara's Imagery at Vatsalyagram.<sup>325</sup>

Looking at these images (and their inordinate number), I appropriate Jain's question and ask – "What do we make of this remarkable semiotic excess, this frenzy of multiple presentation?" (Jain, 2016:169).<sup>326</sup> The answer to this question, I argue, is that these (self) (re)presentations (and their placement and number) do a multitude of things that fashion Rithambara's identity as

<sup>325</sup> The image on the bottom left is of Rithambara embracing a student at the Annual Day Function in March 2014. The other three images are framed displays on the walls of various buildings in the space. (Photographs taken by author on 8 and 9 March 2014.)

<sup>326</sup> Jain asks this question with regards to the murals and statues of the Dalit female politician, Mayawati. While the context of this question is different for Jain and has to do with caste politics and symbolism in India, I find the phrasing relevant to Rithambara's visual excess as well.

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*didi-ma*, indicate her dominance and self-doubt, and establish her governance over *her* territory. To elaborate, the images indicate the anxieties of Rithambara as she establishes control over this space while she also appears as the epitome of benevolence. They make her goodness *visible* in grandiose and unforgettable ways. They establish her as the *centre* of this space and hint at the underlying narcissism and quest for domination that shaped this site. They illustrate her struggles (and successes) for “sovereign power” in the larger project of Hindu Nationalism and describe the presence of a re-configured politics of the right-wing where women were not only actors, but also *the primary* actors (Foucault, 1991). They create an interesting juxtaposition, where Rithambara in these pervasive images becomes inseparable from the Rithambara in person, blending her two performances of a *goodness* that was divinely ordained and re-iterating the discourses and practices of charity of Hindu right-wing women (Butler, 2006a).

Furthermore, like ubiquitous CCTV cameras, they ‘govern’ those that consume them and become instruments of “sovereign power” and surveillance of the morality and goodness of all those who inhabited this space of charity (Foucault, 1991). Finally, on an epistemological and methodological level, these abounding images compel this researcher to wonder how we might write the politics of right-wing women *only* through the visual domain (Pinney, 2004:8).

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Having elaborated on the practices of charity among Zionist and Hindu right-wing women, I now move to examine how these enable a politics of denial and erasure of their designated ‘others’.

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#### 4.5 “States of Denial” – Erasure of the ‘Other’ through Practices of ‘Charity’

It was one of the many Friday mornings that I took the bus to the outpost-settlement of Givat Oz V’Gaon from the heart of Jerusalem.<sup>327</sup> I left my flat, reluctant yet excited at seven-thirty in the morning, and took the empty (Israeli state-run) bus to the city centre. A thirty-minute bus ride and a ten-minute walk later; I hurried down a slope, turned around the corner, and spotted the faces that were now familiar to me. Outside the Inbal Jerusalem hotel, just off King David Street, were a group of my interlocutors, always arriving before I did. Greeting each other, newspaper in hand, and chatting the morning away, they were waiting for the shuttle bus that would take us all to Givat Oz for the morning seminar and breakfast. Some of them lived in East Jerusalem, considering themselves the slightly less hard-core version of *frontier women* and feeling safer “within the boundaries of Netanyahu’s Israel”.<sup>328</sup> Others lived in West Jerusalem for reasons of work, family, and wealth. And a couple of them lived in *Ma’ale Adumim*, an urban settlement just outside Jerusalem. All of them were linked intimately to the settlements in the Southern West Bank having lived there previously, owning homes or small businesses in them, having close family (including parents, siblings, children, in-laws) there, and spending a significant amount of time visiting them and carrying out ‘charitable’ work in these spaces.<sup>329</sup>

That morning, Yitzhak, an old man in the group of women, was selling Hebron-made red wine “to keep”, as he put, “our vineyards and businesses going”.<sup>330</sup> Nira, dressed elegantly as always, read from a prayer book as we waited. Devorah arrived after me and joked that she really must be late that

<sup>327</sup> The title of this section is ‘borrowed’ from the following book by Stanley Cohen – Cohen, S. (2001). *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering*. Cambridge: Polity

<sup>328</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 12 September 2014.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> Conversation with Yitzhak, Jerusalem, Palestine, 12 September 2014.

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morning as I had beaten her to the meeting point. She was carrying flyers for an old-clothes drive she was organizing for a shelter in *Kiryat Arba*. A couple of new faces huddling near old ones, being introduced as visiting friends/family, wondered who I really was and if it was plausible that a researcher was interested in the mundane happenings of this little group.<sup>331</sup>

The bus—a mini-shuttle hired by Women in Green, enough for thirty of us—arrived to ferry us through the checkpoints and ‘dangerous’ roads to the outpost-settlement for the activities of the day. As we boarded the bus, settling into seats, continuing the general discussion on the news of the previous day and the ‘Israeli situation’; I uttered the word *Palestine*. As it is a word that stays on my lips and my mind and heart frequently, I am unable to recall the exact context of my *utterance*. There was a sudden silence in the bus. I had made the gross mistake of *affirming* the identity of Palestine (and Palestinians) by giving them a name—a symbolic point of reference and a collective existence. The heavy yet restrained tension broke when Melanie, who was sitting across the aisle from me, put her hand in mine, and told everyone “she is new here”.<sup>332</sup> She laughed, looked directly at me, and then loudly, for everyone’s benefit, asserted,

There is no such thing as a Palestinian, dear. Palestine is a constructed idea; it doesn’t exist; it only exists because the world makes it exist. There are no Palestinians in the world and that is why we keep asking—if they don’t exist then how are we killing them? You must not say Palestine; you must only call them Arabs, which is what they are.

<sup>331</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 12 September 2014.

<sup>332</sup> Fieldnotes, Jerusalem, Palestine, 12 September 2014.

- Wibben, A.T.R. (2016). Introduction: Feminists study war. In Wibben, A. T. R. (Ed.). *Researching War: Feminist Methods, Ethics and Politics*. London; New York: Routledge.
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Palestine doesn't exist and that is why there is no reason why Israel should not exist.<sup>333</sup>

As she uttered these words, my horror was accompanied with frustrated amusement. Her argument about Palestinian national identity and nationhood echoes that of Anderson's (2006) "imagined communities". Now, if only, my interlocutor(s) could also acknowledge that by the very same 'logic' of nation and identity construction Israel too, did not exist. It was *brought into existence* with the mechanisms of nationalism accompanied by settler colonial violence and mass displacement.

I begin this section with Melanie's words because they not only speak to this section on denial and charity but also echo narratives I heard from my Hindu right-wing interlocutors—an insidious yet important point of convergence. In a long 'open-ended' interview/conversation in a café in South Delhi, Pooja, an integral activist of both the *Samiti* and *Vahini* in Delhi and a campaigner for Modi and BJP, sat across from me. She was staring at her phone and shaking her head. We sipped our cappuccinos—overpriced even for 'posh' South Delhi—and I gently asked her why she seemed bothered. She showed me a post on Twitter by "*some lefty JNU<sup>334</sup> type activist bitch*" that linked to a blog post about Modi's oppressive policies against Gujarati Muslims.<sup>335</sup> I had seen this piece before and its circulation was certainly not new to me (or my interlocutors). Confused as to why this would perturb her so much, I quizzed her, and she replied, agitated and loud,

<sup>333</sup> Conversation with Melanie, bus to Givat Oz V'Gaon, West Bank, Palestine, 12 September 2014.

<sup>334</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi – associated with a leftist intellectual tradition and social activism. In 2015, JNU was the site of a crackdown by the government and police, who arrested student union leaders and charged them with sedition. See more here - <https://kafila.org/2015/10/28/statement-of-outrage-against-police-crackdown-on-students-at-occupy-ugc-faculty-feminist-collective-jnu/>

<sup>335</sup> Conversation with Pooja, New Delhi, India, 18 February 2014.

## List of Websites

- Sangh Parivar (Family of Hindu Right-Wing Organizations) - <http://www.sanghparivar.org/>
- Rashtra Sevika Samiti (National Women Volunteers Association) - <http://rashtrasevikasamiti.org/>
- Durga Vahini (The Army of Durga) - <http://vhp.org/vhp-glance/youth/durga-vahini/>
- Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) - <http://vhp.org/>
- Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) - <http://www.bjp.org/>
- Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) (Nationalist Volunteers Association) - <http://www.rss.org/>
- World Hindu Congress - <http://www.worldhinducongress.org/>
- Hindu Women Forum - <http://www.hinduwomenforum.org/>
- Hindu Defense League - [https://twitter.com/HDLindiaOrg?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor](https://twitter.com/HDLindiaOrg?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor)
- Women in Green/Women for Israel's Tomorrow – [www.womeningreen.org](http://www.womeningreen.org)
- Women in Green Facebook Page - <https://www.facebook.com/Women-in-Green-Women-for-Israel-Tomorrow-153334058037339/>

Why this bothers me is simple. *They* keep telling us we are anti-Muslim, we are against the Muslims in India and that we are doing horrible things to do them and all that. But how can we discriminate against a community that is simply not there? *There are no Indian Muslims*. All these people who are calling themselves Muslim were Hindus anyway. They only converted because the Mullah Mughals placed a sword on their head. If anything they should return back to Hinduism now and then there will be no issue of us being anti-Muslim only. How can we hurt someone who doesn't even exist? How can we be against a community that is not even a real community?<sup>336</sup>

Before I could begin to wrap my head around her reasoning, she added,

These *jholawalas*<sup>337</sup> from JNU, they want to tell us we are anti-Muslim. We cannot be as there is nothing called Muslim in this country. There are Hindus and there are Hindus who lapsed and are anti-national now.<sup>338</sup>

I stayed silent, hiding my blue cloth bag, my *Jhola*, under the table.

Both, the Zionist settler project and the Hindu right-wing movement, are immersed in (and sustained through) practices of erasure. In the former, the politics of erasure ensure the loss of Palestinian identities, histories, narratives, mythologies, bodies, and lives, framing the Palestinian as a simplified 'Arab other' brought into Israeli narratives as and when needed and in the form that suits best (Masalha, 2003; Pappe, 2007; Gordon, 2008; Shams, 2014). In the latter, there is erasure of India's Muslim and Christian communities, the multiplicity of their identities/practices as well as erasure of

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<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

<sup>337</sup> A *Jhola* is a cloth or jute (sling) bag that is associated with leftist activists, artists, feminists, and academics in India. The term *jholawala* translates to one who carries a *Jhola* and is often used as a stereotype and derogative.

<sup>338</sup> Conversation with Pooja, New Delhi, India, 18 February 2014.